



Leprosy

The Facts, Myth and Treatment of Disease



Leprosy is Curable

History

The earliest record of a 'leprosy like disease' came from Egypt, dating as far back as 1400 BC. In China, a disciple of Confucius named Pai-Nie suffered from a disease resembling lepromatous leprosy, which was known at that time as 'li' or 'lai'. In India, leprosy was first described in the Susruth Samhita and treatment with 'chaulmoogra' oil was known at that time. It is said that leprosy was referred to as Kusht in the Vedic writing, which is how the disease is known as even to this day in India, Nepal, Indonesia, Malaysia and many other countries in South East Asia. Clay statues of leprosy patients were also found in Mesopotamia dating as far back as 400 BC.

Initially, leprosy patients were isolated and segregated. Communities were hostile to them and the patients were also self-conscious and afraid to mix with the community. Leprosaria to segregate the patients from the community were built in Europe in the middle ages. Several statutory acts and laws were also enacted during that time against them.

A drug "Chaulmoogra" oil was used for leprosy treatment until "Dapsone" was discovered with anti-leprosy effects during the 1940s. It was in the 1970s when multi-drug therapy (MDT) consisting of Rifampicin, Clofazimine and Dapsone were identified as a cure for leprosy which came into wide use from 1982 following the recommendations of WHO. Since then the services for leprosy patients gradually changed from institutional to outpatient services began to be accepted by the community as a result of intensive health education and visible successful results of MDT.

The Disease

- Primarily affects skin, mucous membranes and peripheral nerves. The public health importance of Leprosy lies in its capacity to produce deformities as well as social & psychological disabilities.

- Leprosy is caused by Mycobacterium Leprae, which morphologically resembles Mycobacterium Tuberculosis. The reservoirs of leprosy is/are infectious leprosy patient (s) who are not taking Multi Drug Therapy (MDT) and is in prolonged contact with healthy persons. Only less than 20% of leprosy patients are of infectious type and with modern Multi Drug Therapy, these patients become non-infectious very rapidly. Even a single dose of MDT kills 99.9% of leprosy bacilli under laboratory conditions. There is no threat of disease transmission if the patient is taking treatment at home. It takes only six months to one year of



complete treatment with MDT to cure pauci-bacillary and multi-bacillary type of patients respectively. Leprosy bacilli have very weak potential of causing the disease and they multiply very slowly as compared to most other bacteria. Under the programme, domiciliary treatment is advised. Leprosy deformity is not associated with infectivity of the disease and the patients seen with mutilated hands/feet etc. are mostly old already treated cases with no active disease and thus do not transmit infection.

The Myths & The Facts About Leprosy

Two common beliefs about leprosy – that it is hereditary and that it spreads by touch – are unfounded myths. It is neither hereditary nor does it spread through casual touch.

Leprosy is the least infectious of all the communicable diseases. It can take years of living in close proximity with an untreated leprosy patient to get the disease.

95% people are naturally immune to the leprosy germ.

Early and regular treatment of leprosy with MDT, available free of cost at all Government health centres and hospitals, completely cures the disease as well as prevents any deformity and patients can live a normal life.

The ulcers and sores that are seen in old, deformed cases of leprosy are not signs of active disease. They result from damage done to insensitive hands, feet and eyes due to lack of proper care. Such people are old, burnt - out and mostly cured leprosy cases and therefore do not transmit the disease.

The word “Leper” should no longer be used in any context. It signifies an old – fashioned and discriminatory approach to leprosy patients. The modern approach is to consider leprosy patients like any other person suffering from a communicable disease, so that they continue to lead a normal life within the community.

Leprosy Treatment

Since the early 1980s, MDT has revolutionized the treatment of leprosy. It is a combination of the drugs – **Rifampicin, Clofazimine** and **Dapsone** and is virtually a guaranteed cure of leprosy as even a single dose of MDT kills 99.9% of leprosy germs.

There are no significant side effects of MDT within prescribed doses and a leprosy patient ceases to be infectious within a few months of starting the course of treatment.

MDT is now available free-of-cost on all working days at all Sub – Centres, Primary Health Centres, Govt. Dispensaries and Hospitals in the country



Multi-Drug therapy (MDT) is a key element