



Global experts turn to India as a key pathfinder on battling tuberculosis

29 August 2011 - Delhi - Tuberculosis - the world's number one infectious disease killer after AIDS - is facing an enemy with escalating power and determination: India.

"India is moving towards universal access for quality TB care and has it in its power to become a global leader on TB research and innovation, as well as on manufacture of essential anti-TB drugs and TB diagnostics," says Dr Vishwa Mohan Katoch, Secretary to the Government of India and Director-General, Indian Council of Medical Research.

India is the country with the world's fastest growing pharmaceutical industry plus a huge potential to become a global frontrunner in biotech, medical and public health research. And it has a compelling incentive to mobilize these assets to thwart TB. It is the country with the highest number of people with TB in the world - 2 million new cases each year of a total approximately 9 million worldwide.

It is small wonder then that leaders in the TB field chose India as the venue for two key international gatherings taking place this week. In Bangalore experts have focused on India's potential to lead the world in developing urgently needed innovations on TB diagnosis. In Delhi, the Stop TB Partnership is thrashing out strategies to address global shortages in quality-assured TB drugs and launching a new guide aimed at helping scientists and public health programmes conduct needed research on how to improve the quality and reach of TB care.

"We are here this week to look at global issues on TB but also to encourage India's government and people to fulfill a great destiny. India is a rising giant. I believe it can be a Titan on TB," says Dr Lucica Ditiu, Executive of the Stop TB Partnership.

In most parts of the world TB is still diagnosed using a microscope - just as it has been done for more than a century. A new cutting-edge TB diagnostic called Xpert MTB/RIF, which was recently certified by the World Health Organization (WHO), can diagnose 30 percent more tuberculosis patients than the current test performed by microscopy.

"This is an important scientific advance, but it is just a stepping stone to what we really need: a rapid test or self-test that can diagnose TB in just minutes and requires practically no special training or infrastructure," says Blessi Kumar, a TB activist and Vice-Chair of the Stop TB Partnership Coordinating Board. "I challenge the Indian research community and pharmaceutical industry to take on this task."

At today's gathering experts highlighted the looming shortage of manufacturers qualified to produce TB drugs that meet international standards established by WHO. With many countries poised to step up their efforts to treat TB, especially multidrug-resistant TB, manufacturers will not be in position to meet demand.

India's generic drug manufacturers could fill this gap and additionally help bring about price reductions, they said.

It takes well-designed research to ensure public health programmes know how to adopt innovations in a way that improves the TB care patients receive and saves lives. *Priorities in Operational Research to Improve Tuberculosis Care and Control* - launched today by the Stop TB Partnership, WHO and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria - provides a roadmap for TB programmes and scientific institutions to do the necessary research to make good decisions.

"India has been one of the most active players in this type of research," says Dr Christian Lienhardt, Senior Scientific Adviser, Stop TB Partnership. "We hope this guide will inspire even greater commitments while encouraging other countries to follow suit - especially now, when they can get funding for this research through Global Fund Round 11."

India has committed to the goals of the Stop TB Partnership's Global Plan to Stop TB 2011-2015, which seeks to halve TB deaths by increasing the number of people tested and treated and through research. The cost of the plan is an estimated US \$ 47 billion. The current funding gap is approximately US \$20 billion.

About the Stop TB Partnership

The Stop TB Partnership is leading the way to a world without tuberculosis (TB).

Our partners are committed to fighting a disease that is curable but still kills three people every minute. Together they are a collective force that is transforming the fight against TB in more than 100 countries. They include the World Health Organization – which hosts the partnership secretariat and is a major partner – government programmes, technical partners, research and funding agencies, NGOs, civil society and community groups and private sector.

Media contacts:

Judith Mandelbaum-Schmid, schmidj@who.int, +41 79 254 6835