

We can

He overcomes tuberculosis with the family support and good character

ILZE VAINOVSKA

Who told that tuberculosis is the disease of poets and artists having grown up in the shadow?

Arnis Veisbuks is a powerful and strong man like an oak tree, and toss the heavy pieces of firewood, almost logs, as it were splinters while working in the heating station. However, it was different last year. The summer thunder time proved to be stronger than him – it sent him down in bed with serious pneumonia. During the treatment, it appeared, that the tuberculosis bacillus was stretching out its ominous head, too. Arnis has taken under control the nasty bacillus after half of year of massive use of the medicines. However, the diagnosis has been pretty a big shock, as his spouse admits.

The contrasts are not good

The heating station, where Arnis works, is in the house basement. The entrance door is so low that it is quite difficult to notice it with a first glance. It is icy cold inside, like in a freezer, even during the summer heat outside. It was especially crazy when heavy sultriness fell last year – Arnis has cut the grass by daytime, and being on duty in heating station at evening times.

“It appeared such a mad thunder – the heat was thirty degrees, no wind, no cool chill through the whole week; it was hard to take a breath. Again - I have spent a cold night in this freezer. I lay down with pneumonia and spent a week home with a temperature more than forty degrees.” Arnis counts that it was about the sixth time in his life when he was seriously ill – previously it was in his teenage years, in the army and some more times. He used to have some medicine but nothing did improve. He could recover his breath in the morning, but it became worse again closer to the evening. No vigor, no strength to eat at all. He was taken away to the hospital by the emergency ambulance. Only 70 kilos left from 130. The medical tests revealed that there was liquid in the left lung being accumulated; and it was penetrating and “pouring” into the right one, too.

“The tuberculosis bacillus can exist, but it may not appear itself open until something great happens, like some “failure”. It may be, for instance, my pneumonia. In this case, it becomes active and creeps out. Still, it can stay underground.” After having spent one month in the regional hospital, he was sent to Riga – to the centre of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases.

Soon discharge home

“The heavy tuberculosis patients were staying confined there; we – the non-active ones – went even for fishing.” There were the big hooks for carp left in Arnis’ rucksack. He made a fishing rod and was catching fish in small Jugla quite nice creek. The native pack of cats was glad about it. He had read over the whole hospital library during the month spent in Riga; it was good, but he became a little bit tiresome with reading. It was the time for the heating season to approach and he was sent home.

“The best thing is when you get to the hospital at once and they find out diagnosis. I had been quickly sent to Riga and I was home after one month. Now we have such modern equipment, which examines people thoroughly from all sides. There was one man from Rezekne in the ward. He has been made to languish on the spot without end; he was the one to stay in Riga much longer. While at home, if you do not visit frequently the doctor, neglect it completely, you have to stay in hospital for half a year or more afterwards, without knowing if it help at all.”

In order to continue the treatment the doctors require possibility for you to visit a physician every morning to take injections and medicines . If not, one should stay in hospital. Therefore, Arnis visited the medical nurse every morning for half a year. From the beginning, he had to take 13 pills per single intake, and then these were 11, after that – 8. “My cheeks were burning during the first months because of that chemotherapy, breathing was more difficult, I got tired faster”, this is what Arnis recall now. Other patients were like dizzy for half an hour – it depends on how strong the organism is.

The family has been examined as well

“There is a little you could change due to an attitude. If you have tuberculosis, you have to go through the full treatment cycle. Tuberculosis is already more spread than many other diseases, but people do not speak much about it. He was neither dangerous nor contaminant bacterial”, wife Zenta says, but later she admits that the shock was quite big at the very beginning. There was no one who could tell anything definite – about how much time one will have to spend in hospital, what consequences could appear. At the beginning, one month had been spent for treatment courses and trying to investigate what is the main reason to trigger the disease. We had to wait for the results of the medical tests for one week.

“I received much more support from the surrounding people while he was in hospital”, Zenta concludes. There are 10 children in the family, the eldest one will graduate school this year, the youngest will start learning. After the primary confirmation about Arnis’s tuberculosis, Zenta also has been examined. “I’m

healthy”, she smiles. Unfortunately, not all children have been examined yet – just five of them. In order to do X-ray investigation, kids have to be taken from local board school, appointment in clinic made and many favourable circumstances should meet together. “I am not upset about children – they do not have long lasting cough and frequent illnesses. If the flu season comes once, all of them almost simultaneously are down with it and recover again fast.”

No one makes a mountain out of a molehill

“At the times of Russian domination, Soviet Union times, the patients were hidden behind bars and they were kept in hospital. Now there is no problem – you can work as a normal person, you can live at home; the only thing you have to do is taking pills. One is afraid of injections; still the pills are not so horrible – not to sweat, just take them. You have to be determined yourself. If you stay half cured, it could be much worse later”, Arnis interprets it in a simple way. He does complete the blood and urine test every month; the results are good. The chemotherapy still has not ruined anything else by its side effects.

“Well, he had to take a great amount of pills for a very long time. We are fed up with that. Surely it is, when one gets tired of it”, Zenta judges on her side. Alongside with the husband’s illness, the financial problems have arisen. Despite the fact, that we not to pay for the medicines and the treatment, the social benefits does not cover all aspects of disease. I had to visit the patient in Riga every week. And the travel is very costly. “I could not help my laughing when seeing my husband doing fishing plunges, using the bottle corks.”

Arnis says the surrounding people have not changed their attitude, too. “When I returned to work, they asked everything about me, how I am, how do I feel, but no one ran away from me. If you know that an individual is healthy again and he goes to work, you can feel safe. Otherwise, you do not know where that bacillus is flying – the one who coughs in the bus may stay beside you.”

QUOTATION

“Those who do not know are horrified about tuberculosis. Well, if you neglect it and do not visit the doctor, you may die as well.”

ARNIS VEISBUKS

FOR REFERENCE

More than 1000 people get ill with tuberculosis in Latvia every year. In January and February this year four people got ill in Liepaya, two people in Liepaya region.

March 24 is the World Tuberculosis Day. Its motto this year is as follows – “I can stop tuberculosis!” The patient can do it while going through the complete treatment course, his/her relatives can do it supporting and helping. Everyone can do it taking a timely health check up.

PHOTO:

Arnis Veisbuks does not consider the overcoming tuberculosis as a great heroic deed. If you are ill, you have to undergo treatment until the completion. It is like when you fight against tonsillitis or any other diseases. Zenta judges that in reality taking pills through this period was up to his ears.

Each person provides distinct personal case

ANDRIS KRISTONS,

Liepayas Tuberculosis Hospital, doctor general

Every case is being managed individually, for best in particular, for better final result – the cure is the paramount. The compulsory condition is that a medical drugs intake by a patient should be done under straight supervision and in presence of our staff personnel. If necessary, our staff medics visit patients at home. The municipality of Liepaya supports our program. It subsidizes ten meals as a food establishment for patients who had been qualify for that by board of the doctors.

Another option is to subsidize public transportation fees for a patient to travel to hospital routinely. On the regional level, outside of the town is a different story. One should control if medics are close enough to reach them, and the medicines are available daily. If a visit to doctor has to take long distance back and forth, it is difficult.

The situation in a common is quite gruesome. There are no compulsory annual health checks anymore, as the part of the prevention program, how it was in the Soviet Union times, but substitution of that came insufficient, in the new born system of the territorial “family doctors”, when some families are not registered under a doctor at all.

Honest and responsible patients are not that dangerous

GUNTA KIRVELAITE,

State Agency on tuberculosis and lung disease; the Chief Executive of Riga Outpatient department

It is difficult to explain, why some of the patients are declining from treatment.

Some of them do not understand, why they have to take medicines for a time period such as six, eight months, if utterly none any symptoms appear, and a person feel fully healthy.

The main reasons would be of social environment. Most of the patients, who are neglecting the treatment course, are from the low income, deprived social groups. I don't know any single case, when a well socially incorporated person would decline from cure program.

My opinion is, the spread of the disease could be taken under control with the public information campaign, and with the public support either.

Because part of the latent tuberculosis patients are not fully curable, just there are some treatment plans to improve their common condition.

It should not be a good action, to isolate them from society. These people are not dangerous for public at all, unless they live in good conditions and strictly adhere to cough hygiene. There are two rules on public. Not only disease bearers should to stick to the rules, but everybody, while on public at least. First of all, when someone is coughing or sneezing, that person has to put a napkin or tissue, even the sleeve or naked hand, to cover the discharge. Second, someone always should spit into a napkin or tissue, but never into grass, path or any other publicly accessed places.