

World TB Day

Poverty - Leading Cause of TB Epidemic

Poverty is one of the leading factors that cause tuberculosis (TB). Thousands of people in Pakistan die of TB every year, just because they cannot bear the cost of its treatment.

This was stated by Dr. Javaid A. Khan, Consultant Chest Physician at the Aga Khan University Hospital (AKUH), during a World TB Day symposium under the theme 'Stop TB, Fight Poverty', held at the University on March 22, 2002.

"The situation in Pakistan is in contrast to the one in Bangladesh where 90% of TB patients are provided free anti-TB drugs under the directly observed treatment, short course strategy (DOTS)," added Dr. Khan. It is the duty of the government to provide free anti-TB treatment to each and every TB patient in Pakistan. NGOs and the private sector could join hands with the government in its efforts to curb the TB epidemic in Pakistan, he suggested.

Dr. Majeed Memon, Consultant Pulmonologist at AKUH, said the stigma attached with TB in the society must be removed. He said TB is a curable disease provided appropriate anti-TB treatment is given for a period of six to eight months. "Doctors must educate the patients about the disease ... it is ironic that many women in Pakistan are divorced when their husbands and in-laws come to know they are suffering from TB," he said.

Dr. Fayyaz Hussain, Head of Pulmonary Section at AKUH, highlighted the deficiency of TB study in the existing curriculum at the medical colleges in the country. Quoting research conducted by Pakistan Chest Society and AKU on the knowledge of TB amongst medical graduates, he said that only 5% of doctors could write the correct anti-TB drug prescription in Pakistan. He added that although there was no shortage of labs in the major cities of Pakistan, there was no mechanism in place to ensure quality control. "There are several tests that are being marketed in Pakistan; these are expensive and have unproven value ... Sputum microscopy remains the best test to diagnose lung TB," he concluded.

Dr. Raana Haqee, Consultant Chest Physician at AKUH, described Multi-Drug Resistance TB (MDR- TB) as a real threat to the entire population of the country. "This type of TB does not respond to the usual anti-TB drugs. MDR usually occurs in patients who had been treated in the past for TB, and when either the doctor's prescription is inadequate or the patient fails to take treatment as prescribed," she explained. MDR is a rapidly growing menace and all medical, paramedical and public representatives need to help combat this disease. Failure to control this resistant infection is associated with high mortality and ominous implications for public health, she warned.

Dr. Tanveer-ul-Haque, Consultant Radiologist, gave a lecture on the X-ray findings on TB, stressing that by X-ray alone it is difficult to judge whether the disease is active or eliminated.