

A New Decade in Leprosy Control

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Mahatma Gandhi wrote : "The individual is the one supreme consideration. No enemy can ever be strong enough or savage enough to withstand the fire of love."

That love was expressed in his deep concern and compassion for the oppressed, such as those with leprosy. Each day Gandhi used to visit the sick members of his Ashram. He used to stop in the hut of Parchure Shastri, who had leprosy, and give him his daily massage. Parchure's body was wasting away.

In 1942 Louis Fischer, an American biographer,

spent a week at the Ashram. He has written that it was a joy to see Gandhi give his message. His touch was firm and yet delicate.

He also noticed that there was only one decoration—a black and white print of Jesus Christ under which was written: "He is our peace."

The 'fire of love' was his motivating force. It is love which reaches out through people to minister to the unloved, lonely and rejected.

Will you share your love by the practical expression of your ministry to the unloved?

LEPROSY is a great problem in India with approximately 3.2 million patients. Out of these about 15-20 per cent belong to the infectious lepromatous type of leprosy. And about 25 per cent of the cases are now showing resistance to the treatment by Dapsone. Approximately 600,000 of the total number of patients are children.

Of the 700 million population in India, about 400 million are exposed to the disease in areas where the incidence of the disease is 5 in 1000 or more. Nearly 12 States are situated in those areas. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Pondicherry, West Bengal and Orissa have an incidence of 10 in 1000 or more.

Government Control

Already in 1954 the Government inaugurated the National Leprosy Programme with the aim of finding all cases and bring them under treatment. Until now 2.4 million are under treatment, leaving 0.8 million which have to be identified and treated.

The National Control Programme has established 6700 SET (Survey, Education and Treatment) centres. There are 382 control centres and 442 treatment centres in the urban areas. The most important task for these centres is to check the population at regular intervals and find new cases, as well as to educate the patients and the people to assist in bringing the patients for early treatment.

In the sixth Five-Year Plan this programme is expected to cover the whole population in the seriously infected areas. A control centre will cover a population of 100,000 people. A Control unit covers 400,000 people.

The Voluntary Organisations

The Voluntary Organisations are also assisting in this programme according to the pattern of the national programme. They have been given the full responsibility of certain areas for control and treatment. Also international organisations are assisting within the framework of the national programme.

Besides the SET programmes, the Voluntary Organisations also have research programmes, medical, surgical and rehabilitation facilities for in-patients. And they give priority to Health Education.

International Expertise

In 1982 the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, launched a Leprosy Eradication Programme, designed to rid the country of this dreaded disease within 20 years.

The group of international experts called by the Prime Minister has made the following recommendations:

1. A systematic examination and treatment in the most infected areas to drastically stop the spread of the disease. This will bring about a quick fall in the incidence of new cases and prevent new cases appearing, as well as prevent resistance towards the available medicines.

2. The working group has strongly recommended that the hitherto treatment by Dapsone should be supplemented with one or two other bacteriostatic medicines like Rifampicin and Clofazimin for the infectious cases. And, Rifampicin in the non-infectious cases.

3. A real motivation of the patients as well as the population through health education is essential to bring all cases under treatment as well as assure regular treatment.

4. The working group has further recommended a continuing campaign of information and education to eradicate the stigma connected with leprosy.

5. As 20 per cent of all cases are children, the working group has recommended a thorough examination of children and young people.

6. To assure that the programme is put into function the expert committee has recommended that a National Committee be formed.

Several other recommendations have already been accepted and financial assurance has been given to put the programmes into effect.

Even though the National Control Programme started about 30 years ago, leprosy is still a major problem. And there are no signs yet, that the number of cases have become less during these years.

An Immunotherapeutic Approach

In Venezuela a trial of an immunisation programme has been started by which lepra-vaccine together with calmettevaccine is being injected with certain intervals to build up the immunity, which is very low in lepromatous cases of leprosy. This, together with chemotherapy may speed the day of complete eradication of leprosy.

This means that patients can effectively be "treated"

with a mixture of the two vaccine which will build up the resistance in the patient. This method should be available in 10-15 years and is a real step forward in the control of leprosy. But this is an expensive way of treatment.

The XII International Leprosy Congress

The International Leprosy Congress will be held for the first time in India, New Delhi, from 20th-25th February. More than a thousand delegates from all over the world are expected to participate.

India is one of the foremost countries in research and treatment. And, many experts in the field of leprosy are anxiously waiting to share latest the findings.

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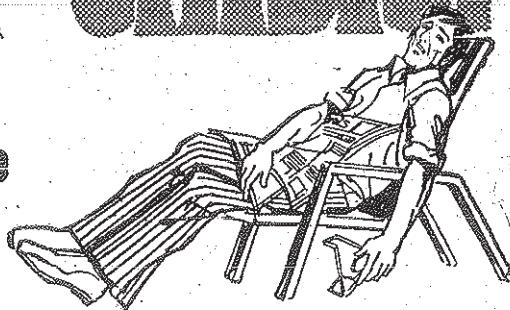
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