

WHO praises Indian TB control efforts

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New Delhi: The fifth Government of India-WHO joint monitoring mission (JMM) of the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP), Government of India, has endorsed the national strategic plan (NSP) for TB Control (2012-17). NSP has also set the goal of universal access to early diagnosis and effective treatment.

The JMM has also lauded the government for its efforts in TB control. However, the JMM cautioned that successful implementation requires an urgent and emphatic expansion in the prioritization, development, financing and deployment of innovative activities to rapidly detect and correctly treat TB cases irrespective of care in public or private sectors.

Endorsing the NSP, the JMM has also concurred with the government's view that if implemented properly, it can save 750,000 lives over the next five years and transform TB control in India. In order to achieve the ambitious goals set-out in the NSP, the JMM recommended that the RNTCP prioritize engagement of the private sector, strengthen supervision systems, extend case-finding to the community level, and support innovation at all levels.

Some of the JMM key recommendations include engaging all care providers to achieve universal access to TB care and prevent drug resistance. Besides the complete engagement with the private sector is critical for prompt and accurate diagnosis. It also stressed that the capacity to incentivize non-government providers and outsource services by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) need to be expanded nationwide.

The recommendations also suggested extending case-finding activities to the community level, focusing on clinical risk groups and socially vulnerable groups, registering and notifying all cases diagnosed, developing the necessary laboratory capacity to conduct quality-assured DST for all TB patients. It also suggested strengthening systems including the regular

prioritized review of RNTCP within the NRHM framework, taking advantage of advances in technology to make DOT more patient-friendly, and developing and deploying alternate approaches for monitoring treatment adherence.

Coming crucially before the country goes into the next phase of programme implementation, the JMM visited field sites and held extensive consultations with various stakeholders to review the progress, challenges and plans for TB control efforts of India. It brought together national experts, affiliated Departments from the MoHFW, civil society, implementing partners, technical and developmental agencies to discuss key challenges, opportunities and recommendations towards achieving universal access towards TB care.

As per the information provided by the health ministry, the RNTCP has examined more than 36 million persons and treated more than 7.5 million TB patients, saving more than a million lives over the last five years. Also, significant political and administrative commitment has been demonstrated by increases in the TB budget, ban on inaccurate serological tests for TB, a national mandatory TB notification and the initiation of a national web-based patient tracking system.