

World TB Day



Special Report

Media-perspective

Breaking the existing barriers for TB care



On the occasion of World TB Day 2017, Research Uptake and Communications team at HERD interacted with some of the popular Nepali media professionals covering health issues to discuss about various issues surrounding TB control in Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Health issues are still under prioritised by Nepali media and therefore media coverage on tuberculosis (TB) related issues is considerably very low.¹ The perception of viewing TB as a common disease has resulted in low level of knowledge and understanding of the disease.

Media has a very important role to highlight various unaddressed and issues which has been considered unimportant. Media can play an instrumental role in highlighting people's sufferings and advocate to address TB related issues at various levels. It can support in sensitising at the public level.

According to National Tuberculosis Centre, TB is one of the foremost public health problems in Nepal, causing a significant burden of morbidity and mortality. About 45 percent of the total population is infected with TB, out of which 60 percent are adults. Every year, 40,000 people develop active TB, of whom 20,000 have infectious pulmonary disease. These 20,000 are able to spread the disease to others. TB causes estimated 5,000-7,000 deaths per year in Nepal. According to 2015 National Tuberculosis Programme (NTP) report, there are registered 34,121 TB cases of which 12,300 (36%) are female and 21,821 (64%) male. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO)

1. A recent study conducted by HERD in collaboration with COMDIS-HSD, a DFID funded Research Programme Consortium based at University of Leeds, UK showed that there were only 185 health related stories covered in the The Kathmandu Post from September 2013 to August 2014 which represented a mere 0.08% of the total number of articles

in 2015, TB caused nearly 800,000 deaths in the South East Asia region while an estimated 4.74 million new cases were reported. Although TB is not a sellable issue in Nepali media, many journalists have covered the issue.

CURRENT SCENARIO

TB has not been a topic of discussion like other diseases. Numerous people regardless of their economic status have been affected by TB especially urban poor (slum). Currently, resistance of Multi-Drug Resistant (MDR) and Extreme Drug Resistant (XDR) TB has increased. Cases have been reported where five members of the same family are found suffering from the disease.

HEALTH SEEKING BEHAVIOUR

The government has aimed to eradicate TB by 2020 but this is a tall order to meet if there is lack of awareness at the public level. Consequently, still many people are not considering the fact that they might suffer from TB. The problem is seen especially in the people living in the rural areas, they do not seek treatment until the symptoms become severe. There are various reasons associated to it such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and geographical situation. Kabita mentions that she was told by the doctors in Rolpa that mostly males are found seeking treatment for TB. The reason might be that they have exposure out-



"The patients who start the treatment are not serious about completing the full dose. They do not think about the complication of skipping medicine which is fatal. There is a need for proper orientation of the patients where they are informed about the importance of drug continuation. Media can play a helping hand in this regard."

Gita Sapkota, The Rising Nepal, Correspondent

Reaching the unreached



"Most TB related interventions are focused mostly in urban areas/municipalities or accessible areas, there are merely any activities covering rural areas. TB prevalence can be minimised if the concerned bodies prioritise those vulnerable areas".

Kabita Upadhyaya, Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS) correspondent Rolpa/ Editor, Junkiri Sansar Saptahik

side as they go out to work. This is associated with our cultural values where females are seen less outside their homes and spend most of the time inside their homes.

Additionally, they do not have access to the health post. One of the important problems that need to be addressed is the drop out of the patients before completing their medication. Media professionals also share that while reporting on TB cases, it seems that there exists the lack of trust in the drugs among the public. Those with a higher economic status are found buying medicine from private pharmacies, even the doctors are found promoting that which shows the low level of confidence in drugs made available by the government. Even the people who know what TB is, are unaware about MDR and XDR TB. Proper knowledge about MDR and XDR TB has not been imparted well. There is a need to inform the public about various types of TB.

EFFORTS MADE

It is encouraging to notice that the national TB control programme has designed its activities to be more patient-centered. However, media professionals opine that proper dissemination strategies need to be designed to ensure that public is well informed about government efforts. It has been long since the TB programme and policy was introduced by the government. According to Praveen Dhakal, the momentum towards TB control in Nepal is progressive. Earlier, people suffering from TB didn't receive any medication but now the patients have started taking it.

The level of awareness has also risen. One of the reasons, the patients are coming openly is also the free service provided by the government. The free service has been benefitting the patients. However, media professionals view that there is a need of monitoring, in order to ensure that the intended beneficiaries are actually being benefitted, they are continuing the medicine and have become more aware about the disease. The media professionals, based on their experience of reporting share that though DOTS clinics and other health facilities have been established and medicines are available, equipment required for treatment is not easily available in all the places.

This even creates an economic burden among patients as they have to travel long distances to receive the free treatment – adding greater risk of their safety and risk of disease transmission. The government alone cannot work to eradicate TB, it has to work on the close coordination of various non-government agencies and media as well. The government has also introduced hostel/shelter home



"We became very successful in tackling TB when the TB programmes and policies were introduced by the government. However, the scenario is completely different now. Therefore, our programmes need to be redesigned considering the current disease burden to make them more effective".

Praveen Dhakal,
Senior Correspondent,
Swasthya Khabar Patrika



"The government has not been able to explain about the treatment portal and TB/HIV funding to various bodies including journalists. This issue is not well informed to the public"

Deepak Dahal, City/Society Bureau Chief, Nagarik Daily

facilities for MDR and XDR patients who require to be under medication for a very long time. However, media professionals point out that effective operation of the shelter home remains a question. For those patients receiving medicine from DOTS clinic, they share that it is tiresome and difficult. According to the media professionals, greater focus and attention is required in order to expand hostel facilities and improve the quality of services provided there.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

The media professionals highlight that the search for the hidden cases of MDR and XDR TB needs to be extended in the advent to eradicate TB. TB is also related to our lifestyle and economic status.

They were positive about the government declaration of providing shelter facilities for 20,000 poor people and view that if the programme is implemented effectively, it will be very helpful to fight TB as it would ensure better living conditions of those ultra-poor population. Media professionals suggest of collaborating with community stakeholders for effective sensitisation at the community level. Education plays a very important role. There is a need to include the topic in school and college curriculum for wider coverage.

The FCHVs have only basic knowledge about TB. The public, family members of TB patients, local bodies, municipality officials as well as police administration need awareness regarding TB. Door to door campaigns could be launched as those at risk may not receive proper message as they don't have access to TV/radio and are illiterate. What happens when one suffers from TB? At least basic knowledge and understanding should be available at the public level in order to answer this question. People still don't know what shelter home is as the information has not been disseminated well. People in various parts of the country are unaware about the services provided through

"To curb the disease, it is important to focus on strengthening media's role as a trusted agency to impart health education. The information disseminated by the media can have a positive impact



on the general public. They can be informed about the importance of the medication and patients can be encouraged to complete their treatment"

**Anil Nyaupane,
Editor in Chief
Swasthya Khabar Patrika**

these shelter homes. People need to be informed about the location and services provided through these shelter homes.

HOW CAN MEDIA HELP?

Compared to earlier days, the level of awareness has risen among the public. Media has played a very important role in this regard. The fact that there is more event-based news reporting might have also contributed to less attention by concerned agencies about such reports. However, there is a need for greater realisation that media can play an instrumental role in imparting health education at the public level. This can be done by bringing the policy makers and media together to promote evidence informed policy making exercise.

CONCLUSION

As shared by media professionals, the government efforts to implement various programmes to curb TB is commendable with establishment of DOTS clinics and shelter homes for MDR and XDR TB patients and provision of free health services. However, there are areas of improvement in terms of reaching out to unreach ones, need to focus on awareness along with quality and accessible treatment facilities. Media professionals also share that involvement of the government bodies is not enough to curb the disease. There is a need to include local bodies so that the programmes reach the poor communities.

They also recommend for more routine and robust monitoring system to be updated on a timely basis about status and progress to inform the public, public health researchers and the programmers more frequently. Media professionals also give emphasis to developing promotional materials about TB using various channels – digital and door to door to reach the unreach population. There is also a need to share more positive

Effective Community Mobilisation



"One way of ensuring services reach the unreach is effective mobilisation of Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs), teachers and cured TB patients for distribution of TB drugs. This will make the patients easy access to get the medicine and will ensure that the patients completes full dose"

**Krishna Adhikari,
Nepal Television (NTV) reporter,
Nepalganj**

messages so that the existing social stigma related to TB preventing patients from receiving the service is reduced. This interaction with the media professionals was a timely reminder of the need of more productive media engagement initiatives to promote better health seeking behaviour and utilising the power of media as a watchdog agency to ensure better health service delivery, particularly in the context of countries like Nepal.

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