

REACH Lilly MDR-TB Partnership

Media Fellowship Programme

2011-12 FELLOW: PEERZADA ARSHAD HAMID



Peerzada Arshad Hamid is a Srinagar-based journalist, covering conflict and social affairs since 2001. Politics, human rights, education and health are his special areas of interest. His work has also appeared in the international media. A postgraduate in Journalism, Peerzada has been associated with several publications including Greater Kashmir, Tehelka and Kashmir Newz.

KASHMIR NEWZ
Because truth matters

Kashmir Newz Specials

Cramped TB treatment unit in Kashmir's worst affected zone

Two small rooms inside a hospital serve as Treatment Unit for tuberculosis in Shopian, the most impacted district in Kashmir, leaving the staff and patients struggle for space amid cartons of medications, and jars of laboratory chemicals. **Peerzada Arshad Hamid** reports.

Srinagar, Jan 28, 2012:

Inside a small room at Shopian district's main hospital, laboratory technician Mohammed Ashraf

Ganai is examining some slides.

Hunched, he looks at a glass slide keenly through the eyepiece of a microscope.

After adjusting the sputum slides properly, he runs his right thumb on his fingers apparently making a count and intermittently jotting the numbers on a notepad.

Dozens of small cardboard boxes are stacked on a shelf to his right. The boxes contain strips of medicine for the TB patients registered with the centre for Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS).

DOTS is a strategy to cure TB patients under Revised national TB Control Programme (RNTCP).

Each box has a specific number and name prominently written on it.

The shelves to his left side and the ones in front are occupied with boxes and glass jars containing laboratory chemicals required in sputum microscopic examinations.

The room, rather a cubicle, can accommodate, at best four people at a time.

"My room serves as DOTS centre as well as laboratory for doing sputum examinations", said Ganai swabbing his tired eyelids with a handkerchief. "Now I have to give medicine to the patients registered with our centre."

Without wasting time, he ventures out and returns quickly along with two persons.

"These people have to take medicine under my supervision", Ganai tells me after a cursory look at the patient's card. Then he scans the shelf for the relevant box.

- * Tuberculosis is an infectious disease that usually affects the lungs
- * It spreads through air via droplets from the lungs when TB patient coughs, sneezes or talks
- * If not treated, each person with active TB can infect on average 10 to 15 people a year
- * Symptoms of TB include coughing for two weeks, chest pains, weakness, weight loss, fever and night sweats
- * Tuberculosis is treatable with a course of antibiotics
- * Tuberculosis is completely curable
- * TB is not hereditary
- * Improper treatment can lead to a drug resistant form of TB- MDR or XDR
- * TB is a leading killer among people living with HIV, who have weakened immune systems
- * Among the 15 countries with the highest estimated TB incidence rates, 13 are in Africa, while a third of all new cases are in India and China.

"Two small rooms inside a hospital serve as Treatment Unit for tuberculosis in Shopian, the most impacted district in Kashmir, leaving the staff and patients struggle for space amid cartons of medications, and jars of laboratory chemicals.... Fifty kilometers south of Kashmir's main city Srinagar, the population of the Shopian district according to Census 2011 is 265,960. Last year the district recorded highest number of TB patients in Kashmir valley. Until November at least 293 patients were registered for treatment."

