

Fighting Tuberculosis in Dhaka

Unhygienic conditions in city perfect setting for TB to spread

SHAMIM AHSAN

Qulsum Begum's (40) keens wobble as she attempts to stand upright at the medicine counter at Tuberculosis Control and Training Institute (TCTI) in Dhaka's Changkharpul area.

Her body jerks in coughs at frequent intervals. "Doctors said I have TB," Qulsum said feebly.

A widow of three years back with two sons and two daughters, Qulsum lives in the Gandaria DIT slum.

"About five months back I caught a cold and a cough, and although I initially ignored them, they persisted," she said.

As Qulsum maintains the five-member family with her sole earnings as a domestic, she did not consult a doctor. It seemed "too common and trifle to pay a doctor Tk 50 for a visit". Although she took paracetamol, her condition continued to deteriorate.

Qulsum's story exemplifies how unawareness, coupled with poverty, puts the poor at a greater risk of TB.

Five months later, Farid Mian a rickshawpuller, and her neighbour, asked her to go to TCTI.

"Farid told me his brother-in-law had died of TB and learning that my cough did not cure for months he suspected that I might have caught TB, too," Qulsum said.

While TB is a great concern for the entire country, about

three lakh people are affected and around 70,000 of them die of TB, leaving the situation specifically grim in Dhaka, where more than 10 million people live, mostly in unhygienic conditions, providing a perfect setting for TB to thrive on.

"There are many reasons that help the spread of TB in the city,"

to the spread of TB are workers of overcrowded industries," added Dr Vikarunnesa Begum.

"Prison is another high-risk area, where most prisoners come from socio-economically disadvantaged sections," she said. "Prisons are characterised by overcrowded, unhygienic poorly ventilated conditions that enhance inmates' chances of

realise they had TB," she said.

"The cure rate of 85 percent shows that TB can be cured, but because of the lack of awareness the detection rate is only 46 percent," she said.

"People must be made aware that symptoms of TB are coughs prolonged for three weeks or more (with or without phlegm accompanied by blood), fever,

month course of the correct dosage of anti-TB medicines.

"People must be made to understand that any break within this six month period, the patient will be affected with drug-resistant TB, called Multidrug-Resistant TB (MDR-TB), which can be very fatal. The cost of this treatment is 100 times more than regular TB," said Dr Selim.

Another risk are private practitioners in every alley in Dhaka, who either due to their failure to diagnose TB or for the fear of losing patients, do not send such patients to the hospital, where treatment is free.

"Often the condition of such patients deteriorate and prove fatal because failure to timely diagnose the disease or improper medication," said Dr Vikarunnesa.

"Combating TB is a huge challenge and the first thing needed is social mobilisation," said Dr Selim.

He urged the media, both electronic and print, to help create awareness, and said that strengthened public-private partnership, with more private involvement in the fight against TB, could make a big difference.

pain in the chest, lethargy and loss of appetite," Dr. Vikarunnesa said.

"If these systems prevail, patients must visit the nearest TB centre and get the mucus tested. People must also be made aware that TB is no more fatal; it can be cured, and treatment is free," she added.

The Directly Observed Treatment Short-course (DOTS) strategy has proved to be very effective in curing TB worldwide. The treatment is cheap and easy, but patients or doctors treating TB must ensure that a patient takes the full six-

being victims of TB," she added.

NTP has 120 centres, with one in Dhaka Central Jail (DCJ) where diagnosis and treatment are provided to TB patients.

"We detected and subsequently treated about 100 patients in a year. We now diagnose 100 out of 10,000 patients, which is higher than the usual 99 patients out of every 1 lakh we had earlier," she elaborated.

Dr Vikarunnesa also emphasised on creating TB awareness and how to combat it effectively. "Most cases of deaths occurred because patients did not

Eden College in chaos

Students want proper seat allocation in dorms

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Students of Eden College are struggling to have illegal resident students evicted from the four dormitories and reinstate the original resident-students of the hall.

The six-point demand by the students included the assurance of political-influence-free seat allocation in the dormitories based on merit.

Non-political students staged yesterday a sit-in protest against the decision to accommodate unauthorised students in dormitories, while the ruling-party-backed Chhatra Dal students staged a demonstration in front of the administrative building.

"Students with political affiliation along with some outsiders are creating chaos on our campus. We want this to be completely stopped. Those who claim that illegal students are residing in the halls are themselves outsiders," said Arifa Sultana Ruma, the Chhatra Dal leader.

When this reporter told the general students that the Chhatra Dal students called them illegal, they vehemently protested: "They are liars. We have Identity Cards (ID) to prove our stand."

"I am sure if the Chhatra Dal students are asked to produce their IDs, they will fail to do so," said Hasna Hena Hashi, of economics department.

The protest started on March 7, when the general students demanded eviction of the illegal residents from the halls. The principal was strongly criticised by the students and the media for calling the protesters – "girls from the streets".

The principal of the college Professor Firoza Begum said

that the media had misquoted her.

"I actually said that a student of honours or masters should not behave like a girl from the streets. But thanks to yellow journalism, I

on our studies in such a crowded atmosphere," said Lucky, a student of Political Science.

"The norm is to allocate seats to students starting from second year of courses. But now seats are given to first year students," said Sharmeen, a zoology student.

Another student, preferring anonymity alleged that seats are sold by Chhatra Dal leaders.

Principal Feroza Begum said: "I have formed a seven-member investigation committee to probe the actual problem though I had never heard of any such problems the students are now raising."

"It is not possible to take immediate action by the authority as demanded by the students. I have asked for time and promised to take necessary action on the report submitted by the investigation committee," she added.

When asked about the allegation against Chhatra Dal activists, she said: "I have no such complaints and these are completely false allegations."

was misinterpreted," she said.

But the protesting students want their demand to be met immediately.

"There are around 30 to 40 illegal students occupying one room. We cannot concentrate

