The Prejudice of Service Providers

Fatema is suffering from kidney stone complications but she has been refused surgery because she is HIV positive.

"With all our referral cases we face this problem whenever they see our note where we mentioned specifically to practice universal precautions, which is standard procedure for doctors in general, they are warded off," explains Dr Nilufar of AsharProdeep.

"An unknown fear and stigma works for these doctors when they come to know that the patient is HIV positive. With the support of UNICEF we took gynaecologists, paediatricians and virologists to Thailand to see their treatment and care procedures. Once they understand then they feel confident about the treatment protocol of such patients. In my opinion it is easier to be infected with Hepatitis C or tuberculosis virus than HIV," she adds.

"In general an HIV positive person is treated with a judgmental attitude from health service providers irrespective of the nature of their health needs. It is seen that any health needs, particularly those associated with surgery where there are chances of bleeding,



are avoided by the service providers. They are afraid of transmission of infection to themselves or infecting their instrument and other accessories in the operation theatre or other in-patient services. This could be easily prevented if the institutions adopt universal precaution services; which mean adequate sterilization of instruments and proper precaution of service providers for preventing cross transmission of any infection including hepatitis or HIV," says Dr Ziya.

"It's a standard mandatory procedure irrespective of giving service to a HIV positive person or not. In reality all the institutions of Bangladesh lack in proper universal precaution services and monitoring, so they are reluctant to provide surgical services to an HIV positive person. It's not a matter of any extra modern technology or instruments," explains Dr Ziya.

UNICEF is working to support services in the of PMTCT (Prevention of Maternal To Child Transmission), where they are raising awareness of clinicians, nurses and other staff, identifying pregnant HIV positive women and providing testing kits and other reagents, drugs, and support for proper deliveries of HIV positive mothers whether normal or Caesarean. The project also has components to advocate for other departments to expand services for infected women. We are hopeful that once we started the interventions, we will have more scope to interact with individual departments and administration as a whole to open up services for positive women," Dr Ziya adds.

A casual comment from Monica Das sums it all up "Ojanar majhe more; janar majhe more na; which when translated means "the fear of the unknown kills you, knowledge doesn't."

lence – free society, to ensure treatment rights as well as establish basic rights for all PLHIV women and children in Bangladesh. "Increasing access to Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) treatment for PLHIV women to reduce HIV morbidity and mortality and make the support more effective through treatment education and empowerment of PLHIV women is the ongoing project of AsharProdeep, along with awareness building on treatment issue and empowerment of PLHIV women," Akter explained their main purpose.

AP also conducts one to one peer counselling, family counselling, spouse counselling and treatment adherence counselling. As a PLHIV women's organisation, Ashar Prodeep is working for HIV infected and affected women and their children in Bangladesh. PLHIV women are still facing stigma, neglect and discrimination at different levels, their needs are being excluded from the development plans of different agencies due to the lack of awareness, limited knowledge on rights based issues, misconceptions about HIV and AIDS, low literacy rates and inappropriate advocacy skills.

Ashar Prodeep has been supported by UNICEF from 2012. "Our main focus is to help AP strengthen its organizational capacity in terms of logistics, chalking out guidelines