

Focus on ending Leprosy transmission among children

STAR HEALTH DESK

The World Health Organisation (WHO) emphasised that national programmes should boost active case-finding, strengthen surveillance, improve contact-tracing and focus more on early detection of leprosy cases among children to ensure achievement of the global target of zero child infection by 2020.

The call comes as the world observes World Leprosy Day (annually, on the last Sunday of January) to mark the suffering of people affected by this preventable and curable disease that has eluded defeat.

Leprosy was globally declared to have been "eliminated as a public health problem" 18 years ago. Some of the children who have recently been diagnosed already showed signs of disability. This strongly calls for early case detection and surveillance.

Leprosy is caused by infection with the bacillus *Mycobacterium leprae*, which multiplies very slowly in the human body. The bacterium has a long incubation period (on average five years or longer). The disease affects nerve endings and destroys the body's ability to feel pain and injury. Data published by WHO in



PHOTO: COURTESY

Multidrug therapy is made available free of charge through WHO and has been donated to all patients worldwide by Novartis since 2000, (and earlier by The Nippon Foundation since 1995) reaching over 6 million patients.

2017 show that although the overall number of cases is slowly declining, that of new cases does not align with global efforts and resources deployed to interrupt transmission.

Reports from 145 countries of WHO's six regions show that of

the total of 216,108 newly diagnosed cases of leprosy during 2016, 18,472 involved children, representing almost 9% of all new cases reported annually.

Leprosy is curable and treatment provided in the early stages averts disability.

Multidrug therapy is made available free of charge through WHO and has been donated to all patients worldwide by Novartis since 2000 (and earlier by The Nippon Foundation since 1995). It provides a simple yet highly effective cure for all types of leprosy.

Despite global efforts to repeal laws that discriminate against those affected by leprosy, adults still face crippling social barriers and children are deprived of education or subject to bullying and rejection due to stigma associated with the disease.

Besides elimination, WHO's new global strategy focuses on working with governments and partners to end the discrimination and stigma associated with the disease and ensure that all legislation that allows for discrimination on the basis of leprosy is overturned.

Continued discrimination against people affected by leprosy has deterred people from coming forward for diagnosis and treatment and encouraged cases to remain hidden, indirectly contributing to transmission.

Social stigma also facilitates transmission among vulnerable groups, including migrant populations, displaced communities, and the ultra-poor and hard-to-reach populations. Combating stigma and ensuring early diagnosis through active case-finding, which the new strategy emphasises, is critical to making progress.

Source: World Health Organisation

CONFLICT

Higher rates of maternal and child mortality

Muslim-majority countries have higher maternal, stillbirth, newborn and child mortality rates compared to the global average and compared to non-Muslim-majority countries, highlighting the impact of conflict and political instability on health outcomes for women and children, according to new research published in *The Lancet*.

There is no indication that religion affects health outcomes, and the findings of the study point to issues such as conflict, migration, political instability and government effectiveness, as key drivers of differences in maternal and child mortality.

Evidence from around the world also shows that higher literacy and empowerment of women positively impact on maternal and child health. While several Muslim-majority countries have made progress on indicators of empowerment and access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, the authors say greater efforts are now needed.

Every year, worldwide, an estimated 303,000 mothers and 5.9 million children younger than 5 years die from largely preventable causes. More than 95% of these deaths occur in 75 countries of the world, predominantly in south Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

Writing in a linked Comment, Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations, says: "Greater investments in reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health are (also) some of our greatest tools in the face of rising levels of conflict and humanitarian crisis, which disproportionately affect Muslim-majority countries. We must prioritise the potential of women and adolescents as agents of peace through greater investments across health, education, and economic sectors."

HEALTH bulletin

New hope for cancer patients

World Cancer Day is the one singular initiative under which the entire world can unite together in the fight against the global cancer epidemic. It takes place every year on February 4.

Immunotherapy and targeted therapy give patients more options in the battle against gastrointestinal cancers. Here we will discuss about some advancement in the field of cancer treatment.

In the past, gastrointestinal cancers such as colorectal cancer and stomach cancer were usually treated with surgery, radiation and/or chemotherapy. Stomach cancer is among the top 5 causes of cancer death among men in Bangladesh.

However, the advent of targeted therapies has had a significant effect of prolonging life for patients with these diseases.

Targeted therapies block the growth and spread of cancer by interfering with specific molecules that are involved in the growth, progression, and spread of cancer. They are not a magic bullet though as the cancer cells eventually evolve and become resistant to these drugs.

Colorectal cancer is the third most frequent cancer in the world, based on total number of patients diagnosed. Colorectal cancer is cancer that originates from the colon (the longest part of the large intestine) or the rectum (the last several inches of the large intestine before the anus). Most colorectal cancers are adenocarcinomas, which are cancers that begin in cells that make and release mucus and other fluids.

Thanks to the rise of targeted treatments, oncologists can now

turn to targeted agents such as Avastin (bevacizumab) and Erbitux (cetuximab) which have been approved for use in fighting colorectal cancer that has spread.

Avastin works by blocking the growth of new blood vessels into the tumour. This deprives the cancer cells of nutrients and makes them more vulnerable to chemotherapy. Erbitux, on the other hand, in tumours which are sensitive to it, can block the signal that tells a tumour cell to grow.



Regulators have approved the use of Avastin against metastatic colon cancer as well as certain types of lung, ovarian, cervical, kidney and brain cancers. Erbitux has been approved for use against certain types of metastatic colon cancer as well as certain types of head and neck cancer.

Targeted therapy is now on the list of approved therapies for stomach cancer. The targeted therapies

that are approved for stomach cancer are Cyramza (ramucirumab) and Herceptin (trastuzumab). Cyramza stops the growth of new blood vessels while Herceptin stops the growth of cancer cells that have too much of a protein known as HER2 on their surface.

"If you have a friend or relative with cancer who asks about what is the latest understanding and what is the latest treatment available, have that conversation with your doctor," said Parkway Cancer Centre's Medical Oncologist Dr Tan Wu Meng.

Another new form of cancer treatment is known as immunotherapy. It is a form of treatment that relies on the body's immune system to fight cancer. The body's immune system is already able to fight off bacterial and viral infections. Immunotherapy makes the immune system work against the cancer, said Dr Tan. "For example, some immunotherapies help remove the camouflage some cancer cells use to hide from the immune system," he added.

Another advantage is how it can keep on working for some time, even after treatment stops. "Once you wake up the immune system, in some cases, you are able to keep fighting," He described advances in immunotherapy as "a scientific revolution happening in front of our very eyes".

So far, immunotherapy has had the biggest impact in the treatment of melanoma and lung cancer. Trials are underway to examine its effectiveness in the treatment of gastrointestinal cancers.



Meet the Press Date: 25th January 2018 (Thursday) PHOTO: COURTESY

First ever successful awake brain surgery at Apollo Hospitals Dhaka

Recently, a patient named Nayan Mollah (26, M) was admitted to the Apollo Hospitals Dhaka with the complaints of seizure, dysphasia and right hemiparesis. MRI scans of brain revealed an enhancing tumour just in front of the left motor area of the brain along with some other parts.

After a rigorous consultation session with doctors and family, the patient opted for an awake craniotomy (an operation performed in the same manner as a conventional craniotomy but with the patient awake during the procedure).

The operation was headed by Dr. Md. Aliuzzaman Joarder, Neurosurgery Consultant and Neuroanaesthetist Dr. Zahid Hossain from Apollo Hospitals Dhaka. Now, Mr. Mollah lives his life without any neurological problem.



Causes

Using a hot tub, whirlpool, or swimming pool that is not properly treated with chlorine

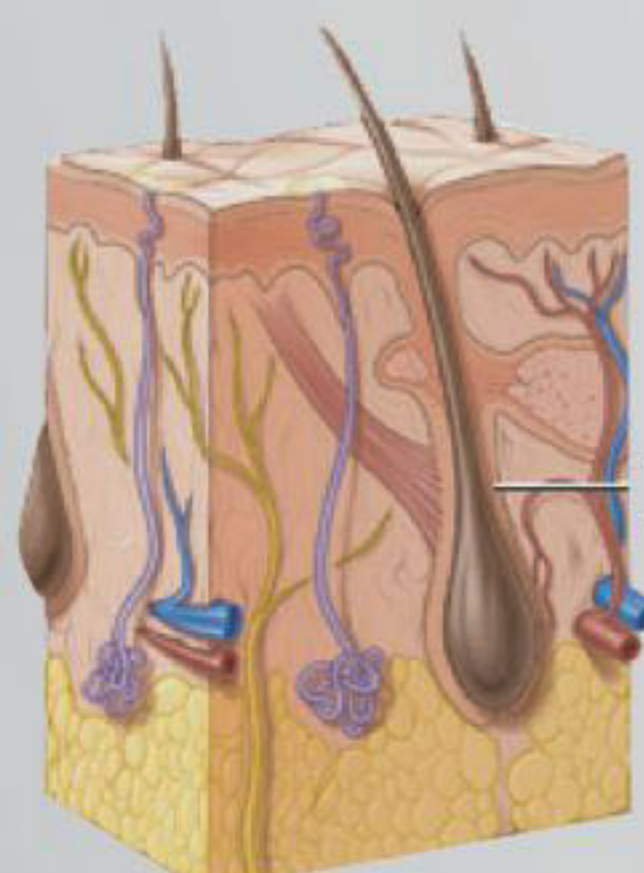
Wearing tight clothes

Using or working with substances that can irritate or block the follicles. Examples include makeup, cocoa butter, motor oil, tar and creosote

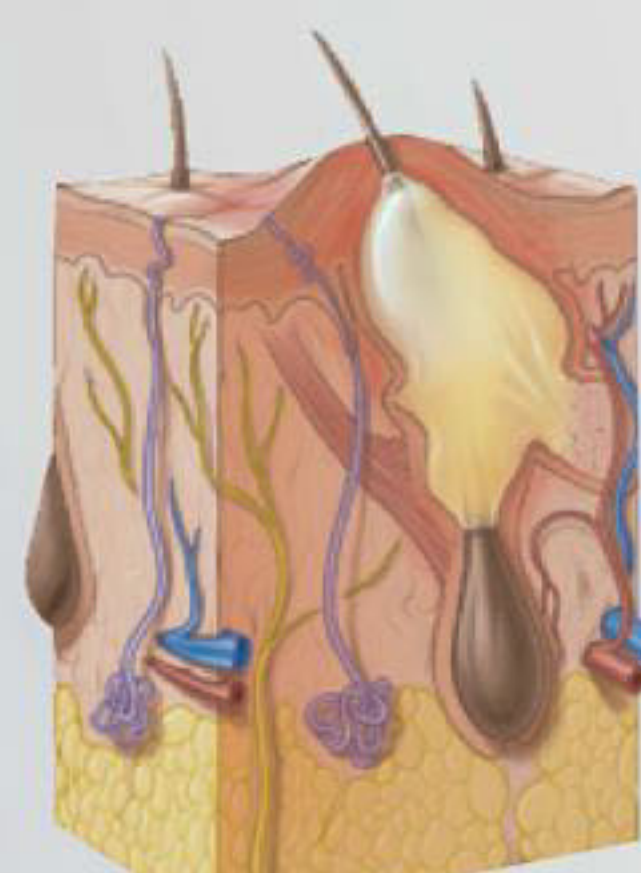
Having an infected cut, scrape, or surgical wound. The bacteria or fungi can spread to nearby hair follicles

Having a disease such as diabetes or HIV that lowers the ability to fight infection

Folliculitis is a common skin condition in which hair follicles become inflamed. It's usually caused by a bacterial or fungal infection



Healthy hair follicle



Infected hair follicle



Symptoms

Clusters of small red bumps or white-headed pimples that develop around hair follicles

Pus-filled blisters that break open and crust over

Red and inflamed skin

Itchy or burning skin

Tenderness or pain

A large swollen bump or mass

Treatment

For mild eosinophilic folliculitis, doctor may suggest to try a steroid cream. If condition is severe, he or she may prescribe oral corticosteroids. Such drugs can have serious side effects and should be used for as brief a time