

Doctors pledge to eliminate leprosy by 2025

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48th Annual National Conference DERMACON 2020 takes place in Pune



On World Leprosy Day, IADVL (Indian Association of Dermatologists Venereologists & Leprologists), the country's premier institute of Dermatologists announced the inauguration of its 48th Annual National Conference DERMACON 2020 in Pune.

The 4-day conference from 30th January 2020 to 2nd February 2020, witnessed doctors and the medical fraternity addressing Derma led grave diseases like Leprosy, Vitiligo and abuse of steroid-based medicines. In the year 2005 India leprosy was eliminated from India and today shockingly due to the resurgence of disease we are home to 66 per cent of cases global. In other words, two out of every three new global leprosy cases are detected in India. IADVL which is the second-largest dermatologist association, on World Leprosy Day took a pledge to spread awareness and work towards the eradication of Leprosy in India. DERMACON is one of IADVL's initiative which is an annual event to educate and communicate the people about the disease.

DERMACON also addressed the lack of awareness and abuse of steroid-based ointments, medicines which are being purchased over the counter from medical or general stores. In recent years India has reached a pandemic where such skin diseases have become steroid-resistant and more and more cases are being reported. This year's conference was attended by globally renowned doctors (31 International Faculty and 400 + Indian faculty), where they shared their expertise and knowledge.

In 2005 WHO had declared that India is fully eradicated of leprosy, but shockingly with 66% of the cases prevailing in India, sadly our country is the capital of Leprosy. With the aim to eliminate the disease, IADVL is working towards many initiatives and one of the key focus is on educating society.

During the discussions at the event, it was revealed that in Maharashtra itself there are Sixteen thousand new cases reported every year out of which 4500 cases are from Nagpur itself. The active districts where leprosy is widespread are Thane, Raigad, Vidharbh and Palghar, there are cases reported because of the tribal belt. The resurgence was reported first in UP in 2012 with 20000 new cases followed by Bihar with 18000 new cases every year.

During the inauguration of DERMACON 2020, Dr. P Narasimha Rao, IADVL President said “It is time we face the harsh reality that Leprosy is coming back, and it can be tackled only by collaborative efforts. To make India truly Leprosy Free – we all need to have a correct understanding of leprosy and compassion toward those with the disease. It is only then that Leprosy patients will seek treatment and will be able to live with respect in the society. Leprosy is not a disease of the past, it is still an ongoing issue therefore, on World Leprosy Day 30th January 2020, we at IADVL pledge to work towards Mission Leprosy Free India”.

Dr. Kiran Godse, President-Elect (IADVL) reiterated the fact that “There is a lot of stigma and isolation which is associated with leprosy which is very harsh for the patients and their families have to endure it. Patients are abandoned not just by the society but their families as well and in India it’s very sad to see that even the law doesn’t show any compassion towards them. Today, through the efforts of research and science, leprosy is a curable disease if detected early and for that the drugs are also distributed free of charge. Fearful of being diagnosed, people often do not go to a clinics or hospital because of the stigma related to the disease. This therefore is one of the biggest obstacles to early diagnosis and treatment thereafter.”

“Despite the fact that early diagnosis is 100% curable and prevents further deformity and spread of the disease, the fact that leprosy can be treated with drugs, just like other diseases. The people who are suffering, continue to face discrimination to the extent that they are separated from their families; children are unable to attend school; a few lose their jobs; and a few who have missed out on the chance of getting married. Even after their recovery they are still termed as ‘ex-leprosy patients’ and are looked down upon, said Dr. Anil Patki, Leprosy Specialist Pune”

“Though leprosy is claimed to be eliminated, the continued occurrence of new cases and static new case detection rate in the country for the last fifteen years post elimination (2005) is a matter of great concern. There is a need for strengthening referral systems, identifying the magnitude of clinical problems like reactions, nerve damage and deformity and their early management specially after stopping treatment in order to contain the morbidity associated with the disease in the community. Evaluation of chemoprophylaxis as a strategy is important and so also monitoring and surveillance of drug resistance at national level, said Dr Vivek Vasudev Pai, Director, Bombay Leprosy Project”.

Dr. Narendra G Patwardhan, Organizing Chairman (DERMACON 2020) addressed the abuse of steroid-based medicines and said “Corticosteroids, also known as steroids, are anti-inflammatory medicines used for a range of conditions. These are present in some creams used as fairness creams, combination drugs, antifungal, anti-bacterial combination, these irrational combinations are prescribed by family physicians, pharmacists without understanding the dangerous impact of steroid use.”

Dr. Dhanashree Bhide, Scientific Chairman (DERMACON 2020) further added that “The widespread misuse of skin creams and lotions that contain steroids in India is harmful and out of control. Indian doctors are witnessing a pandemic of adverse effects induced by topical corticosteroids. These steroid creams and lotions can lead to substantial and permanent damage, especially on thin skin, such as on the face and groin. Side effects include pigmentation and breakdown of the skin, small and widened blood vessels on the skin, as well as bacterial and fungal infections. Misuse can also lead to resistance of infections that can make these difficult to diagnose and treat”.

Dr. Pradyumna Vaidya, Organizing Secretary (DERMACON 2020) spoke about developed countries where topical corticosteroids are available strictly by prescription and sale thru any other medium is restricted. These should be used judiciously, for appropriate indications and duration and only if prescribed by qualified Dermatologists. He further added “Citizens, as well as doctors of all specialities, need to be informed and educated about safe use of topical corticosteroids. The government needs to implement a strict policy for its dispensing, approvals and prescription given by respective authorities. Even qualified medical practitioners in India are ignorant about rational prescribing, therefore, we at IADVL appeal to the government to ban these "irrational combinations".