

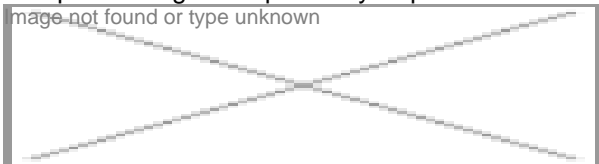
India scales up efforts to control TB

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The Indian government has given a go ahead to the proposal mooted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for scaling up services for controlling tuberculosis. These include the diagnosis, care and management of drug resistant tuberculosis under Revised National TB Control Program (RNTCP). The project with an estimated cost of \$144 million (649 crore) has an assistance from the Global Fund.

With the scaling up of diagnosis, care and management services for multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB), the RNTCP shall establish 43 state-of-the-art laboratories using latest diagnostic technologies throughout the country. The project shall also scale up care and management of MDR-TB in the country resulting in the initiation of treatment of 55,000 cases. The project is expected to get completed by September 2015.



The reports have shown that with the implementation of RNTCP the estimated rate of TB prevalence is on the decline in India. According to the WHO Global TB Report, 2009, the TB prevalence in India is currently 185 per lakh population as compared to 283 per lakh population in the year 2007. Periodic prevalence surveys conducted under the model of Directly Observed Treatment Short-course (DOTS) project by Tuberculosis Research Center (TRC), Chennai, has shown a 12 percent annual decline in TB prevalence.

To control TB, the RNTCP, widely known as DOTS, which is a WHO-recommended strategy, is being implemented as a 100

percent Centrally-Sponsored Scheme in the country with an objective of detecting at least 70 percent of the estimated New Sputum Positive cases in the community and treatment success rate of at least 85 percent.

THSTI, IAVI to develop HIV vaccine

The Gurgaon-based Translational Health Sciences and Technology Institute (THSTI) and The International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) will jointly establish, operate and fund an HIV Vaccine Design Program. This program will focus on one of the greatest scientific challenges of AIDS vaccine design and development: the elicitation of antibodies capable of neutralizing a broad spectrum of circulating HIV variants, a problem that stems in large part from the almost unparalleled mutability of HIV.

The HIV program will capitalize on recent research advances that have sparked a renaissance in AIDS vaccine R&D. In September 2009, scientists at IAVI and their colleagues in the Neutralizing Antibody Consortium (NAC), which is overseen by IAVI, reported the isolation of a pair of potent and very broadly neutralizing antibodies against HIV. That discovery, the first-of-its-kind in a decade, was followed by the isolation of other broadly neutralizing antibodies (bNAbs) by researchers at the Vaccine Research Center of the US National Institutes of Health and by the IAVI affiliated team. The most promising of these antibodies are now being scrutinized by researchers to elucidate the specific mechanisms by which they bind and neutralize HIV. The idea is to create artificially-synthesized mimics of their targets on HIV, to be used in vaccines to elicit similarly potent bNAbs and teach the immune system how to thwart HIV infection.

Government steps in to control cancer epidemic

The Government of India has reformulated a National Program for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) for the remaining two years of the 11th Five Year Plan. As per the Population-Based Cancer Registry, functioning under the National Cancer Registry Program of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), it is estimated that at any given point of time, there are 28 lakh cancer patients in the country.

Further, as per the report of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on 'Time Trends in Cancer Incidence Rates (1982-2005)', the number of cancer patients is growing over the years at an average of approximately 1.2 percent per year.

The new program envisages prevention and control of common non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including cancer, through behavior and life style changes; build capacity at various levels of healthcare for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of common NCDs; train human resource and establish and develop capacity for palliative and rehabilitative care. Under the program, diagnostic services, basic surgery, chemotherapy and palliative care to cancer patients at 100 districts across 21 states are being provided. The central government is also supplementing the efforts of the state governments by focusing on early detection of cancer, health education and creating awareness through print and electronic media.

New DBT, ICMR guidelines for probiotics

Probiotics are the live microorganisms that live inside the human body and confer health benefits. The globalization of food trade has followed the Indian markets with many of probiotic products.

In order to safeguard the consumers from any adverse effects, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Department of Biotechnology (DBT) have framed guidelines to ensure standardization of commercial products and their efficacy. A 10-member task force was constituted under the chairmanship of Dr NK Ganguly, president, JIPMER, Puduchery and former director general of ICMR, to deliberate on the issues regarding probiotics.

Dr MK Bhan, secretary, DBT, said, "The ICMR-DBT guidelines comprehensively address various concerns regarding safety, efficacy and reliability as well as labeling of probiotic products being sold in India. I hope the scientific community, the regulatory agencies and the public at large will be benefited by these guidelines"

The report also quotes Dr VM Katoch as saying that the guidelines have been developed for scientific purpose with the main aim to guide the regulatory authority for evaluating probiotic products in India. "I hope that these will also stimulate thinking among scientists interested in developing this area in India," said Dr Katoch.

The global probiotic market generated \$15.9 billion in 2008 and is expected to be worth \$32.6 billion by 2014 with a compound annual growth rate of 12.6 percent from 2009 to 2014. On the other hand, the probiotic product industry in India was estimated to be around \$461,116 with a projected annual growth rate of 22.6 percent until 2015. With these kind of guidelines in place, it is expected that the regulatory authorities will ensure that the general public is not taken for a ride.

GOI sets up task force for pharma

The Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has constituted a task force to evolve a long-term strategy for addressing

various issues faced by the Indian pharma industry. This comes after the leaders of the pharma industry strongly requested the Union Health and Family Welfare Minister, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, to constitute a task force to prepare a long-term strategy for strengthening the drug sector in the country and look into matters concerning medical devices, clinical research organizations and R&D labs.

The task force that will submit its report within three months has the mandate to evolve a short, medium and long-term policy and strategy to make India as a hub for drug discovery and R&D. The task force will recommend measures to tackle the problem of spurious drugs, use of anti-counterfeit technologies, and devise roadmaps for implementation of all recommended measures.

The task force will bring out policy measures to promote indigenous production of bulk drugs, prevent take over of Indian pharma companies by MNCs, drug pricing, promotion of generic drugs and recommend measures to assure adequate availability of quality generic drugs at affordable prices.

Himachal biotech park gets green signal



After the clearance from the state government and assistance from the central government, the biotech park at Himachal Pradesh will soon become a reality. The 35-acre biotech park is expected to capitalize on the Himalayan bioresources. Besides boosting the employment and other financial requirements of the region, the state-of-the-art park is expected to attract investors from India and abroad.

The park will be set up at Aduwal village near Nalagarh in Solan district and will have a biotechnology incubation center and a biotechnology industrial cluster. The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Mr Prem Kumar Dhumal, revealed that the Himachal government is looking for a partner to develop a multi-billion biotechnology industry park, under public-private-partnership (PPP) mode.

Speaking to BioSpectrum, Dr Nagin Nanda, director, Department of Environment, Science and Technology, Government of Himachal Pradesh, said, "We have invited the financial and technical responses for the biotech park project and six companies have responded to the technical bid process. This is a tripartite process in which the central government, Himachal Pradesh government and the private developers are involved."