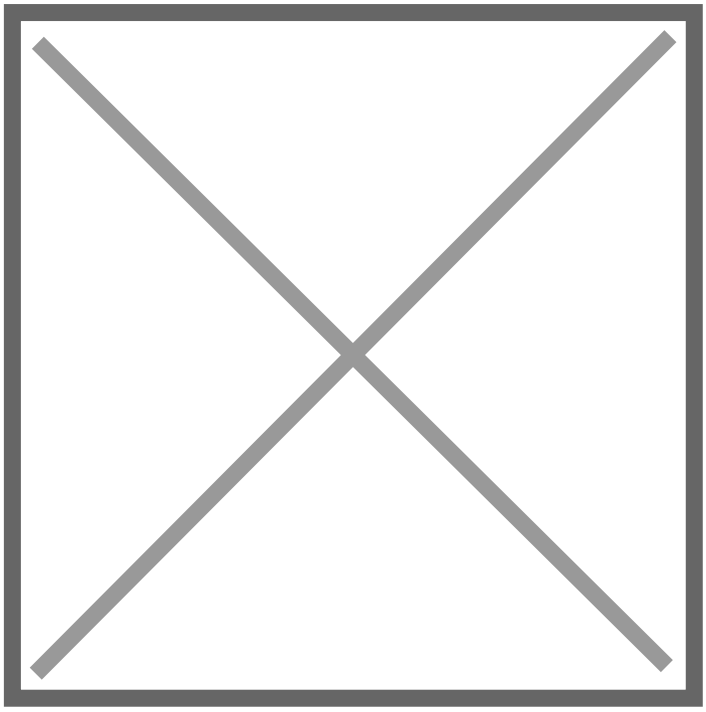
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Life expectancy of HIV patients in India increased

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Life expectancy of HIV patients in India increased



Close to 700 participants from across the globe assembled to deliberate upon actionable strategies for fighting the global HIV epidemic, in the 3-day long HIV Congress 2014, held in Mumbai.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. J.K. Maniar, organising chairperson, HIV Congress 2014 commented, "The global scenario of HIV is changing day by day. Until twenty years ago, there was a huge amount of social stigma associated with HIV- patients were sceptical to consult doctors and even doctors had limited knowledge. Earlier, a patient had to consume 20-25 pills a day to survive, and still had to bear numerous side effects, along with high costs of the medicines. A lot of deaths were due to lack of early detection of the disease and the side-effects of the available drugs."

He further added, "Today, HIV has transformed into a chronic, controllable and easily manageable disease. Due to increased levels of awareness, patients seek early consultation and treatment, which automatically improves the prospects of a healthier life. Currently, a patient has to take only a single pill, with no accompanying side-effects, and at an affordable cost."

"Rolled out in 2004, National ART program has evolved from 8 ART centres to network of 1280 ART service delivery points wherein 7.5 lac patients are receiving free ART. This has changed the outlook of HIV from a death sentence to chronic manageable disease. Recently NACO has also decided to introduce 3 rd line ART in addition to 1 st and 2 nd line ART," said Dr. B.B. Rewari, national programme officer (ART) WHO/NACO. A recent initiative has been to provide multi drug ART to all positive pregnant women to ensure that no child is born with HIV.

HIV, once considered a catastrophic infection, is no more life threatening today. The credit goes to ongoing worldwide research in this area, new drugs and initiatives to raise awareness about HIV and its management.

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Mr. Oussama Tawil, UNAIDS coordinator, India said, "An HIV patient in India can now live a healthier life with an almost normal life expectancy. The Department of AIDS Control along with private practitioners is currently expanding access to treatment and working with civil society organization to ensure continuum of care. Scientists continue to challenge themselves by exploring newer molecules with even lesser side effects and also drug delivery systems that reduce doses."

Mr Khanna added, "Indian pharma industry has contributed to global ARV medicine requirements with generic version at affordable price. This has helped various government and procurement agencies reach out HIV medicines in access programmes towards making 15 by 15 access a reality."

The focus of the HIV Congress 2014 was to disseminate and share knowledge about HIV amongst clinicians, to enable them to devise more effective disease management methods, encourage young physicians to take up HIV as a speciality, and bridge the gap between private HIV physicians and government bodies like Department of AIDS control (DAC), WHO and UNAIDS, in turn encouraging collaborative research on HIV in India.

According to the Department of AIDS Control (India) as of the year 2012, an estimated 20.3 lacs people are living with HIV. The number of new infections has come down by 57% to 1.1 lac per year due to increased awareness and wider availability of free ART.

With modern HIV treatment, doctors are hopeful that many HIV Positive people would be able to live as long as their HIV Negative peers. A lot of effort is being put into making the HIV treatment more accessible to everyone who needs it. Without treatment, people with HIV will almost always eventually become severely ill, and their lives would be shortened.