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World Hepatitis Day: 'India lagging behind in Hepatitis research'

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World Hepatitis Day is observed on July 28 to raise global awareness of viral hepatitis (an inflammation of the liver caused by a virus), and to call for access to treatment, better prevention programs and government action. There are five different hepatitis viruses - Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E.

This year, the theme for World Hepatitis Day is 'ELIMINATION' with ambitious targets by WHO member states and a goal to eliminate hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030. One of the five core intervention areas of the global elimination strategy is treatment including new, well-tolerated medicines and treatment regimens for people with chronic hepatitis virus infection.

According to the Indian Society for Clinical Research, attainment of this goal requires scaling-up clinical research in hepatitis extensively, particularly in India which carries a high burden of hepatitis B and C.

"Of the five different types of hepatitis, there is no cure for three of the types. Hepatitis C alone affects an estimated 12 million people in India, most of whom do not know that they have the disease. When you take into account the other types, the combined burden of viral hepatitis in India is high. Moreover, all types of hepatitis are contagious and some of them can be potentially life-threatening. Yet, despite the alarming statistics, we as a country have not undertaken enough clinical research in this area. We need treatment regimens that are short and therapies that are effective, affordable and well-tolerated," said Suneela Thatte, President, ISCR.

India has 17 percent of the global population and 20 percent of the global disease burden but less than 1.4 percent of all global clinical trials are done in India.

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"India was never a country that had a very high percentage of trials relative to the trials being done in the rest of the world nor is it our objective to be the number one country in the region or globally for doing trials. What is important is that the trials being done in India are significant enough to address our growing burden disease and the unique healthcare requirements of our country. People living with viral hepatitis have a right to safe, affordable and effective care and treatment," added Ms. Thatte.

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