

IS TB ELIMINATION IN INDIA A DREAM OR REALITY?**R. Naveen Shyam Sundar*¹ and Sneha B. Suresh²**

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Motivating Facts

Currently, India is contributing for 27% of the global TB burden. More needs to be done. The India TB Research Consortium was established to support research, diagnostics, treatment, and vaccine development activities that are required to meet the goals. The consortium is funding a phase 3 trial for a novel recombinant BCG vaccine. The Consortium has also backed global Tru-NAAT machine validation. These methods will allow the TB programme to quickly deploy new tools and technology in the fight against TB. These methods will allow the TB programme to adopt new techniques and technology quickly and early in the fight to eliminate TB.

These positive outcomes resulting from well-thought-out policy, coordinated implementation, and the establishment of a patient-centered support system offer a ray of hope. So far, most of the states and union territories have voluntarily committed to eliminating tuberculosis, and it is expected that this will function as a significant motivator for other states to follow suit. India has a track record of

successfully eradicating significant public health issues such as smallpox and polio.

Alarming Scenario

In India, tuberculosis, or TB, killed an estimated 504,000 people in 2021. That's nearly one a minute. In a strict sense, TB elimination means that for every 10 lakh people, there should be just one case of TB. Under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nation

member countries have united to fight TB and eliminate it by 2030. The government's initiative and devotion are commendable. India is lagging behind the rest of the world in terms of TB case decline, with an annual rate of 2 percent. Even if the incidence decline rate is enhanced by a certain percentage, TB will not be eliminated by 2030. According to current projections, eliminating tuberculosis by 2025 will be a tough task. However, in order to even come close to achieving the goal, all stakeholder will need to collaborate. The government must significantly strengthen the operation of the NTEP by boosting financial allocation to carry out the programme more aggressively and effectively. In addition, the government must increase the availability of daily fixed-dose regimen under direct observation and provide modern diagnostic technology across the country.

Another challenge is detecting the existence of tuberculosis in diabetic patients, as the WHO estimates that 15% of TB cases worldwide are connected to diabetes due to weakened immune systems. Diabetes is widespread in India, necessitating specific attention to reduce the risk of tuberculosis, as recommended by the WHO. Co-morbidity between HIV and tuberculosis is also a significant issue that must be addressed if the disease is to be eliminated completely. Although most of these workers are from younger age groups and are unlikely targets for the bacteria, the presence of migrant workers in high numbers from various North Indian states has been identified as a concern for complete elimination.

Given the intimate link between socioeconomic conditions and tuberculosis, a technical solution is unlikely to be successful. Apart from the private sector, a humanistic strategy to TB elimination should be able to produce multi-sectoral efforts involving many government ministries. Patient support groups, nutrition programmes, infection control programmes in hospitals, livelihood initiatives, stigma reduction, and increased private sector participation are among them.

TB poses certain challenges for the government to address, despite the government's amazing efforts. *Years of neglect resulted in unrestricted disease transmission* among persons who have Latent TB infection, which can reactivate at any time. In India, a large portion of the population is malnourished, which results in decreased immunity, allowing the disease to spread more easily.

Positive Thoughts

We may learn from the Polio Campaign, which was a big success since major stakeholders like hospitals, government, NGOs, social workers, and others banded together to make India Polio-free. In overcoming the condition, a holistic strategy was taken. In the event of tuberculosis, the same needs to be done.

The disease of tuberculosis must first be managed. The first aspect that must be addressed is detection and identification. High-risk areas must be thoroughly inspected, with specific attention paid to those who have had close encounters with TB patients.

The government should make TB reporting mandatory, and an effective management information system (MIS) should be in place to boost case reporting and disease mapping. Instead of waiting in line, people can register themselves online.

Private institutions must step up and build long-term models in order to assist patients suffering from the condition. Targeting tuberculosis as an illness that is affordable to treat will encourage people to come forward and seek care.

In a word, a Tuberculosis-free India is not a pipe dream if the government, NGOs, the corporate sector, and the people of the country work together to eradicate the disease from its roots.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created vast health-care issues for India, but it has also given the country an opportunity to structurally rethink its core public-health delivery systems, particularly in the area of respiratory illnesses. The pandemic has also influenced people's perceptions of their vulnerability, both individually and collectively, influencing people to wear protective masks, avoid spitting, practising hygiene and handwashing, maintain appropriate social distance, and take collective responsibility for their own and the community's health. These will operate as catalysts in the public's adoption of prudent health-seeking habits and contributions to prevention efforts.

Final word – by 2030 elimination of TB in India is much a bigger dream to be made as reality

Expert reference

It is almost a Herculean task to eliminate TB by 2025 going by the current scenario. With the current rate of annual decline of TB cases globally being 1.5%, India is lagging behind in its national decline rate, which is less than 2%. Even if incidence decline rate is increased,

elimination of TB from the face of the earth is not expected before 2100," said Rajendra Prasad from the Department of Pulmonary Medicine, Era's Lucknow Medical College and Hospital.