

Leprosy looms large in Maharashtra

Expert stresses on need to promote reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation of those having or developing deformities due to the disease

By A Staff Reporter

In view of re-emergence of leprosy in Maharashtra, experts have expressed concern and said that there is an urgent need to pay adequate attention towards timely detection, diagnosis and treat those infected with the disease and correct and rehabilitate those who are detected with deformities and disabilities.

According to experts, the disease takes time to develop and that incubation period can range from six months to many years. Besides the faint hypopigmented patches on the skin which has no sensations, it affects ears, eyebrows, nose, eyes and testicles among other body parts. The bacteria *Mycobacterium Lepae*, its causative agent also has predilection

for cooler areas of the body and the proximal nerve trunks where it passes through anatomical tunnels.

According to Government of India's National Leprosy Eradication Program 2016-17 Report, new leprosy cases detected during 2016-17 indicates the proportion of multibacillary leprosy (MB-49.57%), Female (39.17%), Child (8.7%), Grade II deformity (3.87%), ST cases (18.80%) and SC cases (18.78%).

As a complex infectious disease, leprosy mainly affects skin and nerves and the disease is recently on rise in Maharashtra since 2014 even after the disease was stated to be "eliminated" meaning less than 1 case per 10,000 population. In 2016, Maharashtra ran a special campaign to detect Leprosy cases. The phys-



ical examination to detect patch of leprosy or redness of face and nodules or enlargement of nerves or deformities due to leprosy was conducted covering over 4.59 crore population, suspecting leprosy in about 1.64 lakh inhabitants out of which 5,053 new cases

were unearthed.

Gadchiroli, Palghar, Jalgaon, Nashik, Chandrapur and Thane district witnessed higher numbers of leprosy cases.

As for the treatment, "tertiary hospitals see mainly refractory cases of leprosy

which do not respond to or have resistance to standard MDT. We need to apply the advanced treatment as suitable to cure a person or treat the leprosy reactions," said Dr. Vinay Saraf, Senior Dermatologist.

Dr Atul Shah, Senior Consultant, Nanavati Super Speciality Hospital who recently received the International Gandhi Award 2017 for Leprosy from the Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation at the hands of Vice-President of India, Honourable Venkiah Naidu said, "Leprosy is a very complex disease. Unlike other communicable diseases, its effects are visible and often tends to remain a lifetime. We need to promote the reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation of those having or developing deformities due to leprosy. He em-

phasised that prevention of deformities and wounds takes precedence in health programs, but tertiary hospitals are required to manage complex cases of deformities leading to their rehabilitation. Further, training of junior surgeons plays an important role."

However, early detection and treatment cures leprosy and prevents disabilities and thus aim of the Special Campaigns is to create awareness among people about leprosy and availability of curative treatment, medicines and care in health centres. Without awareness, it would be a very difficult task to eradicate the disease as per the norms of World Health Organisation. Alarm bells are ringing. We need to pay attention urgently," the expert emphasised.