



Global Launch of World Tuberculosis Day 24th March 2003

“DOTS cured me, it will cure you too!”

On 24th March 1993, tuberculosis was declared a global emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO). 2003 marks the 10th anniversary of that declaration. It also marks a major milestone in modern TB control; according to WHO estimates, by **24th March 2003***, 10 million patients will have been treated under the **DOTS** (Directly Observed Treatment Short-Course) strategy.

The DOTS strategy, recommended by the WHO, comprises five elements that are crucial to the effective diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis patients. They are: government commitment to sustain TB control activities, case-detection by sputum smear microscopy, standardised regimens of 6-8 month's treatment with proper case management and directly observed therapy for at least the two initial months, regular uninterrupted supplies of essential drugs and standardised recording and reporting.

This strategy, whose cost-effectiveness has been demonstrated by the World Bank, has been implemented by many countries the world over. But it is not enough.

Tuberculosis continues to kill about two million people each year in the world. Most of these deaths are avoidable. The objectives of the Stop TB Partnership, to detect at least 70% of new smear positive cases and cure 85% of these by 2005, is still an international priority.

“DOTS cured me, it will cure you too!”, is thus the theme for World TB Day 2003; a rallying call for tuberculosis patients to come forward, tell their stories and share their experiences with others.

The DOTS strategy has proven itself over and over. Where it is being correctly implemented, cure rates are high; rates of 84% have been achieved in DOTS programmes in India. Unfortunately, case-detection is lagging behind and emphasis is now on encouraging people to seek diagnosis.

“We really do need to encourage people to seek medical care”, confirmed Dr. Nils Billo, Executive Director of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (IUATLD). “We have come a long way since 1993: international mechanisms such as the Global Drug Facility (part of the Stop TB Partnership) now exist and have been instrumental in lowering the prices of anti-tuberculosis drugs. But more efforts are still needed to help the poor gain access to treatment.”

“These past few months have seen some changes that will undeniably contribute to the global struggle,” he continued, “such as the recent nomination of Dr. Jong Wook Lee as Director General of the WHO; he has made tuberculosis and HIV priorities for his administration.”

Tuberculosis is particularly present in 22 countries, known as high-burden countries, which account for 80% of all global TB cases. Of these, India and China have the highest number of cases whereas some countries, such as Peru and Vietnam have already reached the Stop TB Partnership case-detection targets of 70% and treatment rates of 85%.

The TB crisis is also severely affected by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) pandemic. In countries such as Uganda, where more than 31,000 new TB cases were reported in 2001, on average half of the tuberculosis patients are also infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). In Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the WHO, case fatality rates have increased from 5% to 20% in the worst affected countries. Up to 70% of patients with sputum smear-positive pulmonary TB are HIV-positive whilst TB is the commonest cause of death for people living with AIDS.

“During 2003 we must address the double burden of TB and HIV” concluded Dr. Billo. “Several symposia and workshops will be dedicated to this subject at the 34th IUATLD World Conference on Lung Health, to be held in Paris in October”.

For more information about 2003 World TB Day campaigns, please contact:
www.stoptb.org

Background to World TB Day

On the 24th March 1882, Robert KOCH presented his discovery of the tubercle bacillus to his colleagues at the Physiological Society in Berlin. The decision to commemorate Koch's contribution to fight against tuberculosis was made in 1982, following a suggestion made by the Mali TB Association, a member of the IUATLD. The first World TB Day was celebrated in 1983.

Background on the IUATLD

The IUATLD is an international scientific organisation of 131 member countries and 100 voluntary scientific societies headquartered in Paris, France. The IUATLD has been a leader in the field of tuberculosis since its establishment in 1920 and it works closely with the World Health Organization. Its scientists developed the DOTS strategy which was adopted by WHO in 1993 and has since been implemented by the national TB control programmes of more than 148 countries. The IUATLD provides direct technical assistance to 50 countries throughout the world, conducts clinical trials, organises conferences and training courses and publishes the peer reviewed *International Journal of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease*. The IUATLD currently runs 33 international training courses in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America aimed at improving the skills of health workers and National Tuberculosis Programme managers in developing countries.

The 34th IUATLD World Conference on Lung Health, 29th October – 2 November, Paris, France: “Globalisation, opportunity for lung health?”

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