

Social Support for TB Patients

Why in news?

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The Central TB Division has said the government would hand over a sum of Rs. 500/month to each of India's 35 lakh identified TB patients.

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What is TB?

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- Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease usually caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.

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- It generally affects the lungs, but can also affect other parts of the body.

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- The World Health Organisation's TB Report, 2017 stated that India had the highest number of tuberculosis patients across the globe.

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How can it be eliminated?

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- Elimination of Tuberculosis is defined as restricting new infections to less than one case per 100,000 people.

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- This is certainly possible only if patients are diagnosed and cured without any break in treatment.

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- Interruptions can exponentially raise the patient's risk of developing multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB), which is harder to treat.

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- The Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP) thus aims at offering regular and uninterrupted supply of high quality anti-tuberculosis drugs.

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- The drug regimen, called Directly Observed Treatment Short-Course (DOTS), is provided for free of cost under the Programme.

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How effective can the recent measure be?

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- The funds are intended to offset the loss of wages due to TB, and to help with travel and nutrition.

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- Studies are showing that there is a considerable linkage between **low body mass index and nutritional deficiencies** and the **higher rates of disease**.

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- Under-nutrition is also an established risk factor for progression of latent TB infection to active TB.

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- Under-nutrition contributes to an estimated over one million new cases of annual TB incidence in India.

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- Half of all adult Indian TB patients get the disease due to malnutrition.

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- Given this, the proposed assistance of Rs. 500 may address only a part of the problem.

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- The Central TB Division had proposed to double the rations under the public distribution system to families of TB patients.

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- This is expected to decrease the possibility of contracting the disease.

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What should be done?

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- Taking forward the TB-diet link, it is essential that proper research into the right kind of interventions be taken up.

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- The right nutritional supplement for TB patients should be devised and incorporated into governmental interventions.

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- Nutritional assessment, counselling and support are integral aspects and should be integrated into the overall care management of TB patients.
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- Ultimately, reduction of TB burden in India and its elimination will require improving the nutritional status of the community as a whole.
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Source: The Hindu

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