

EDITORIAL NOTE

Lessons from Cape Town

The 38th world Congress on TB and Lung Diseases was held in Africa from 8 to 12, Nov. 2007 in the beautiful city of Cape Town. Three thousand medical specialists from 120 countries including 700 participants from South Africa gathered in an atmosphere free from political, racial and religious strife, to discuss a common goal to fight against a microbe discovered by Robert Koch on the night of March 24, 1882 which he showed to the world to be the cause of TB.

What caused the noble specialists of lung disease and bacteriologists of the world to come together with young scientists to be concerned about the future of mankind? The report of Nils Billo, the executive secretary of the union, and also WHO colleagues revealed the frightful aspect of Mycobacterium tuberculosis more than ever. The latest WHO reports show that one third of seven billion population of the world are infected by this microbe. Furthermore, more than 8.8 million new TB cases occur annually, resulting in 1.6 million fatalities. Additionally, 424,000 MDR-TB and 27,000 XDR-TB have occurred with 116,000 and 16,000 mortalities respectively. The dramatic concurrence of TB/HIV found in 630,000 cases, led to 195,000 deaths in a year. Alongside the commendable unrelenting efforts of the TB specialists to control this disease, this harmful microbe is making many of the classic drugs ineffective. Since then, the alarm bells have started ringing to warn us of the emergence of MDR and XDR TB. Our institution the NRITLD stands second place in introducing this dreadful phenomenon to the world. The distressing association of TB and HIV has dealt another shock which has thwarted strategies of healthcare since 1981 causing specialists to give-up the dream of controlling TB by 2015 prompting all countries to substantially revise their National TB Programs. Our country has been inundated with infected patients from the North, East and West and our nation has undertaken the momentous task of treating these defenseless patients. Once again our institution, NRITLD and health management services of the country have never denied them and supported these patients without the least expectation of gratitude. Since the Iranian mind set is deeply affected by the teachings of Saadi, the well-known 8th century Iranian poet who stated:

"Of one essence is the human race"

"Thusly has creation set the base"

"One limb impacted is sufficient"

"For all others to feel the mace."

The IUATLD has made fundamental changes in its organizational formation to confront the serious status of TB. In particular, regarding the issue that smoking is the source of most lung diseases, the IUATLD has established individual departments for Tobacco control and HIV. In the congress held in Cape Town and its different committees, our young colleagues of the NRITLD gave exceptional lectures on HIV, smoking and TB which gives glad tidings of a promising future.

A noteworthy point in management of the union was the election of Dr. Enis Baris from the World Bank as the president (in place of Professor Elsoni) and also the election of Prof. Mohammad Reza Masjedi for the 4th time as the general secretary of this internationally renowned union. Today, we need to be more determined than ever to fight the disease, train specialists for our regional neighbors, expand our research activities, enforce our "National Stop TB Partnership" and provide young talented researchers the opportunity to undertake responsibilities to battle the dilemmas in the fields of TB, HIV and Tobacco control and motivate them to this end.

We should also bear in mind this nice sentence from Nima Yushij, the Iranian poet who stated:

"O, ye who are sitting at the beach, smiling and feeling happy,"

"There is someone drowning in water."

Dr. Abolhasan Zia Zarifi

Honorary Member, IUATLD

Advisor, National Research Institute of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease

Tehran-Iran