Worldwide 9 million people still get TB, 3 million are not treated and around 2 million die from the disease every year. South Africa is burdened by one of the worst tuberculosis (TB) epidemics in the world. And, our gold mining industry may well have the highest incidence of TB in the world, with cases ranging from 3,000 to 7,000 per 100,000 miners per year, according to the Department of Health’s 2007 – 2011 strategic plans for TB. We are winning battles but the war on TB has not been won.

On 24 March 1882 Dr. Robert Koch announced that he discovered the cause of tuberculosis, the TB bacillus. At that time, one in every seven humans died from TB. Knowing the cause of TB lead to the discovery of streptomycin (1944), Para-Aminosalicylate Sodium better known as PAS (1943) and isoniazid (1952) which lead to people being cured of TB.

Right from the start, effective treatment for TB required multidrug therapy for a period of months. More recently, HIV had a huge impact on TB with many people developing active TB once their immune systems were degraded by the HI virus.

TB hotspots (areas most heavily affected by the disease) are occurring, where people from groups such as migrants, miners, drug users and sex workers, live in the poorest, most vulnerable communities.

With TB so common in South Africa any person who suspect that they might be infected because they are having one or more of the symptoms such as coughing up blood-stained sputum, have fever, night sweats, are having a persistent cough without having a cold, are losing weight without dieting, remain fatigued, or have chest pains, should seek medical attention. A person who are living or working closely with people who have TB symptoms or who are on treatment for TB should also go for assessment.

Screening for TB and the appropriate treatment is freely available at all public health institutions. The South Africa National Tuberculosis Association (SANTA) provides training for volunteers in DOTS (Directly Observed Treatment Short-course). It is important work because by helping people to adhere to the treatment we prevent new infections and drug resistance.

http://www.santa.org.za/
http://www.worldtbday.org/
http://www.stoptb.org/events/world_tb_day/2014/

The high level of new infections and annual death rate is clear evidence that our current efforts are not good enough. In 2014 countries, societies, communities and individuals are urged to become more active and to play their part in stopping TB. A global effort is needed to find, treat and cure every person who have TB and to accelerate progress towards zero TB deaths, infections, suffering and stigma. In order to do so we need to invest more in research, develop the means to prevent infections (vaccines), develop new tools to diagnose quicker, discover medicines to treat more effectively and extend our TB programmes to ensure every person has equal access to adequate care.

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