

Since the year 2000, 2 343 900 people with tuberculosis (TB) in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region have successfully been provided with treatment and care through DOTS, the basic package that underpins the global Stop TB strategy. However, millions more people in countries of the Region still do not have access to quality tuberculosis care.

Before World TB Day, 24 March, and at the launch of its report Multidrug and extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis: 2010 global report on surveillance and response, WHO has warned of the rise in number of cases of drug-resistant tuberculosis and has called for an urgent scaling up of efforts to control tuberculosis, including its severe forms.

According to the latest estimates, the tuberculosis case detection rate, i.e. the number of new tuberculosis patients registered, is still low in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, at 58%. In contrast, the global target for case detection is 70%, as set by the Global Plan to Stop TB (2006–2015) in order to achieve the relevant targets of the Millennium Development Goals. It is estimated that 90% of the undetected tuberculosis patients are in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan. However, this does not suggest that tuberculosis is not a problem in other countries of the Region. Limited awareness of this preventable and curable disease, inadequate infrastructure to detect, diagnose and treat patients and limited involvement of health care providers outside the national tuberculosis programme are common challenges to many countries of the Region.

To meet the challenges in expanding quality tuberculosis care and access and scaling up efforts against the drug-resistant forms, especially in countries with high disease burden, innovation is urgently needed at each level of regional response. Engaging community, media, health care providers, academic and financial institutions through partnership is needed now more than ever.

On World TB Day 2009, the Million Youth March mobilized more than 1.8 million young people and tuberculosis workers, supporters and advocates to march and reiterate their solidarity with and support for 1 million tuberculosis patients in the Region. For World Health Day 2010, innovation in tuberculosis care is being celebrated by countries through music and activities involving former tuberculosis patients, youth and health workers, who are at the forefront of the fight against tuberculosis.

Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for Eastern Mediterranean, in his message on TB Day, emphasized the need to take up the struggle with renewed spirit and hope. He said “World TB Day, held every year on 24 March, exists to remind us that we should not let this situation continue. The Day is not just to remember tuberculosis. It is also to renew our commitment and efforts. Getting everyone together, pooling our resources and putting up a joint fight that can be sustained are the purpose of the Day”.

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