News and Notes

QUALITY SERVICE TO LEPROSY PATIENTS USING MOBILE PHONES AND PAGERS

Bombay Leprosy Project (BLP) has been engaged in leprosy control work in the slums of Mumbai for more than two decades. Besides providing free medical relief to leprosy patients, BLP has been providing disability services to a large number of patients coming from all parts of the city, its suburbs and even from the neighbouring districts of Thane and Raigad. BLP has undertaken several clinical trials with newer drugs, which are of great significance in today’s context for achieving the goal of leprosy elimination and ultimately reaching a state of a ‘World without Leprosy’. Leprosy patients with deformities receiving disability services at their doorstep need to be followed up to ensure service compliance and to evaluate the progress of disability status. Hence, these patients need to be monitored for a long time, even for as long as 8–10 years, using a team of community volunteers (CVs) trained by the paramedical workers (PMWs) of BLP. These CVs, involved in suspecting new leprosy cases among the slum population by door-to-door surveys, also provide domiciliary medical treatment, monitor the progress of nerve damage, offer field-based disability care and identify clinical problems occurring in some of the patients who have already completed the prescribed course of treatment. While performing these activities, they come across several medical problems in the field for which they need to seek instant advice from the doctors in the Central Monitoring cell.

With the advent of modern telecommunication equipment, ‘Mobile phones’ and ‘Pagers’ have come to our rescue to overcome the communication barrier. These gadgets enable workers to establish contact with the Central Monitoring cell even from the depths of congested slums and rural areas as the communication network has wide coverage (roaming facility). BLP is the first project to have used these instruments since 1998 in leprosy management to establish contact with the CVs working in the slums as well as remote areas and give specific advice or instructions on the management of complications that might be encountered by them. The PMWs & CVs working in the field are equipped with mobile phones and pagers which have made a breakthrough in providing instant medical consultation for leprosy patients thereby preventing the occurrence of consequences such as reactions/neuritis and development of new disabilities. On the spot decisions on immediate treatment with steroids are now possible. This technology has been found useful in improving patient care and also in avoiding any delay in communication.

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