

Rotary International and Lepra fight back against COVID amidst rising cases in India and global testing failures

India is now the second most affected country in the world by COVID-19, with over 6 million cases reported since and rising every day.

Lepra, an international charity that works extensively across India, mobilised in March to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, filling gaps in government assistance for those most at risk and ensuring that those with leprosy are also educated on the dangers of COVID-19.

Rotary International boasts 35,000 clubs, with the aim of promoting peace, fighting disease, providing clean water and sanitation services, supporting education and growing local economies.

In November 2019, Lepra and three Rotary International clubs in India and one in the UK signed a Memorandum of Understanding to combat leprosy. Now, as COVID-19 ravages India and puts stress on an already weakened health system, Lepra and Rotary international will work together to ramp up testing for COVID-19.

Former president of Rotary Club Stratford, Rt Suraiya Kassamally, generously donated towards the project, highlighting the deep connection between Rotary in the United Kingdom and Lepra. This project has also been assisted by the host club, Rotary Club of Jubilee Hills in Hyderabad.

Lepra trustee, Rtn Nayan Patel said: “We are profoundly grateful to Rotary for their hard work, dedication and support of Lepra. COVID-19 has had an enormous effect on the lives of everyone across the world. The partnership between Rotary International and Lepra will enable us to make a substantive difference to the lives of thousands.”

Lepra works predominantly, though not exclusively, with people in overcrowded, underfunded, resource poor areas including slums, where people do not have access to adequate food supplies or proper hygiene facilities. All of which are breeding grounds for disease, especially COVID-19.

Over the past few months, Lepra has been in a unique position to offer assistance to the Indian government, as well as its people, regarding testing for COVID-19 and develop the research surrounding the disease.

Our Blue Peter Public Health and Research Centre, based in Hyderabad, procured a new Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) machine, which helps to isolate genetic materials based on swab samples. Through fundraising in the UK and assistance from Rotary international, the team at BPHRC were able to purchase this machine, gain accreditation and begin testing. There has been a special focus on frontline health workers and those in the most at risk and vulnerable categories

Dr Aparna Srikantam, head of research at Blue Peter Public Health and Research Centre, has been working with a dedicated team to test and study COVID-19 during the pandemic.

She said: “The addition of the new PCR machine has transformed BPHRC into a COVID response laboratory making it the only NGO lab in the state of Telangana, India, to have contributed to COVID lab testing. So far, the centre has carried out more than 2,500 tests serving suspected COVID cases, family contacts, the general community, the vulnerable, health care workers, police and all similar people who fall into two groups essential workers and marginalised people.”

Globally, the issue of efficient and accurate testing has been making headlines.

Geoff Prescott, Chief Executive of Lepra stresses the importance of testing: “Testing and providing accurate, fast results are essential. All epidemic control rests on early detection and active case finding. Without either there is no real prospect epidemic control.”

Lepra’s ability to test has expanded in large thanks to assistance from Rotary. They will assist with the provision of PPE, testing reagents and other materials needed to test people for COVID-19.

Himanshu Jain, Founder President of Rotary Club of Stratford, London said: “We are working together with Lepra to do a pilot Leprosy Control Programme in India. When we found out that Lepra India has the ability to do PCR testing, it was only natural to do what we can and enable testing of the underprivileged. In India, unlike the UK, testing is often not free and that leaves the poor very vulnerable. We sincerely hope that everyone has access to testing as that can be the difference between life & death.”

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For more information, please contact:

Eleanor Brennan – Communications and Marketing Lead

EleanorB@lepra.org.uk -

Notes for Editors

About Lepra and leprosy

Lepra is a UK-based international specialist charity that has been working to beat leprosy since 1924. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II became Patron of Lepra in 1952, shortly after the death of her father King George VI, who had been Lepra’s Patron since the charity was founded in 1924.

Leprosy affects over 7 million of the most vulnerable people in the world, causing life-changing disabilities and attracting terrible prejudice and discrimination. **But there is a cure.**

Lepra works to beat leprosy in India, Bangladesh and Mozambique by finding, diagnosing and treating people affected by the disease. By raising awareness, pushing for early detection and supporting people living with disabilities caused by leprosy, Lepra works towards a day when this disease no longer destroys lives.

Last year, the charity reached 301,000 people through diagnosis, treatment and care. It reached a further 1.7 million people through health education and events to raise awareness of leprosy and other neglected diseases.

Find out more about Lepra on its website and social media channels:

Website: www.lepra.org.uk

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/LepraUK>

Facebook: <https://https://www.facebook.com/LEPRAUK/>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/LEPRAHinA>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/LepraUK/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/lepra/>