

India faces TB drug shortage

17 June 2013 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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According to international aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), India is currently experiencing stock outs across the country of both paediatric TB drugs and those used to treat drug-resistant TB (DR-TB). The stock out is said to be related to the persistent issues with drug procurement that India faces in many of its public health programmes. The resultant deadly delay in tendering for these drugs and the resulting drug stock outs are said to be one of the reasons why India has one of the world's highest burdens of DR-TB.

MSF has appealed to the Indian government to urgently address this issue and the almost routine delays of procuring drugs to treat tuberculosis "As a country with such a high burden of tuberculosis, MSF is deeply disturbed that India is experiencing stock outs of critically needed drugs to treat children and those with drug-resistant TB", said Leena Menghaney, India manager of MSF's Access Campaign. "In this instance, it's a stock out that can cost people's lives and the government must act urgently to fix the problems.

Under India's public TB treatment program, the central government is responsible for buying drugs and distributing them to the states which then provide treatment.

Dr. Homa Mansoor, the TB Medical Referent for MSF India has said, "As a TB treatment provider, MSF is witnessing the impact this is having on our own patients. In our Mon, Nagaland project, I've seen a 12 year-old girl on treatment arrive with her father after a long journey to get her medicine. The medicines were out of stock, but luckily we had six days' worth of drugs available from a patient who had died. Otherwise, we're having to resort to breaking adult pills to give to children, which is really dangerous as it could over- or under-dose them."

Dr Mansoor added, "A continuous, sustainable supply of quality-assured medicines is vital for TB patients to have even half a chance of being cured. Its just not good enough that India talks of scaling up DR-TB treatment, but finds the medicine cabinet empty at a time when the most vulnerable patients - those diagnosed with DR-TB - are most desperate to get the medicines that can treat them".

The stock outs in India are occurring as the World Health Organization late last week issued interim guidelines on bedaquiline, the first new drug to treat TB in 50 years, approved by the US Food and Drug Administration at the end of 2012.