

Coverage from the 39th Union World Conference on Lung Health

'Private medical professionals an asset to anti-TB efforts'

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Medical professionals working outside national tuberculosis (TB) control programs are an asset to the fight against the disease, not a liability, Dr RV Asokan told delegates at a pre-conference meeting of 39th World Conference on Lung Health in Paris.

Dr Asokan, the Indian Medical Association's National TB Coordinator, was one of several speakers at the special session on engaging professional associations in TB control efforts, organized by the DOTS Expansion Working Group of the Stop TB Partnership.

The involvement of private healthcare providers is seen as crucial to effective TB control and care, particularly in high-burdened countries. In India, 75% of all anti-TB drugs given to patients are administered by the private sector.

WHO's Stop TB Strategy envisages the engagement of all care providers using public-to-private and public-to-public approaches in line with the International Standards for Tuberculosis Care and the Patients' Charter for Tuberculosis Care.

In India, national programs collaborate with the Indian Medical Association, Indian Academy of Paediatrics, Federation of family Physicians of India and several other healthcare associations.

Efforts are also being made to link these associations to groups working at a district rather than national level and training programs and continued medical education sessions are often organized to encourage doctors to become involved in TB care and control.

According to Dr Asokan, 100,000 more people could be successfully treated each year in India if just 10% of private practitioners properly treated two people with TB. But a number of barriers to improvements remain, including bureaucratic delays preventing Directly Observed Treatment Short-Course (DOTS) centres from officially registering.

Issues surrounding the transport of sputum, medical supervision and quality assurance also need to be addressed by the private sector and the National TB Control Program, Dr Asokan said.