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India inching towards Rabies Free Status by 2030

Rabies is a zoonotic disease transmitted by the bites of rabid animals especially dogs. Since centuries scientists are trying hard to find ways to beat the virus and control rabies but have failed to control this vaccine preventable disease. In last few years many new advances have been made by researchers to remove hurdles to prevent rabies that has lead WHO to give a call for **“Elimination of Dog Mediated Rabies by 2030”** i.e. to achieve zero human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030 worldwide in line with the Sustainable Development Goals’. Most important step in this direction is simplified rabies prophylaxis guidelines 2018 issued by WHO. The three shot intradermal vaccination and only wound infiltration of rabies Immunoglobulins have made the entire prophylaxis affordable and acceptable. Since 2014, Himachal is following this simplified rabies prophylaxis schedule and have achieved almost zero rabies deaths by making rabies prophylaxis free to all. We have our rabies prophylaxis manual and extensive hands-on trainings have been given to all doctors, pharmacists and nurses in the state. Every death due to suspected rabies reported by any hospital or by media is tracked and investigated and gaps are identified for action.

Another major initiative has been taken by National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Delhi by formulating new rabies prophylaxis guidelines 2019 based on the guidelines issued by WHO in 2018 under National Rabies Control Programme. These guidelines focused on dose and cost sparing intradermal vaccination and only wound infiltration of rabies Immunoglobulins. Another mile stone was crossed by NCDC when they made **“National Action Plan for Elimination of Dog Mediated Rabies in India by 2030”** that included all the stakeholders under one roof. The stakeholders include Human Sector, Animal Sector, Wildlife sector and Municipalities up to panchayat level. Role of different departments has also been defines e.g. Education, Science & Biotechnology, Fiancé and Police. Role of NGOs and International agencies has also been highlighted. Most important step is the surveillance of Animal Bites and Human Rabies cases and will be undertaken through existing IDSP/IHIP portal. Dog bite case surveillance including lab surveillance and surveillance of wild life are important components. A Road map for Rabies elimination by 2030 has been developed and funds are to be made available through NHM.

More and more states are now shifting to intradermal vaccination and only wound infiltration of rabies Immunoglobulins. With sufficient funds available through NHM, states are now calling tenders for rabies vaccine and Rabies Immunoglobulins (RIG) and in case of shortages of RIG, Monoclonal rabies antibodies are also being used.

Now NGOs like APCRI has very important role to play by monitoring state wise progress of implementation of **National Action Plan for Elimination of Dog Mediated Rabies in India by 2030**. A feedback mechanism to NCDC from each state need to be developed to plug the gaps for effective implementation of the plan. We need committed volunteers in each state to take responsibility to independently monitor the progress of trainings, IEC and reporting besides availability of rabies biologicals and lab diagnosis.

It has been long cherished dream of APCRI to control Rabies in India and many efforts have already been put by APCRI members in this direction since decades. Now is the time to realize this dream of rabies free India by developing a feedback mechanism to NCDC and help each victim of dog bite to access free rabies prophylaxis in remotest parts of the country that have suffered unequal access to health, since centuries.

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