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New "National Guidelines for Rabies Prophylaxis 2019"

Released by GOI

The new "National Guidelines for Rabies Prophylaxis 2019" released recently by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is a welcome step that would pave the way for rational use of rabies biologicals. Dr. Simmi Tiwari, Deputy Director and Officer In-charge, National Rabies Control Program deserves a special mention for working hard to lead all of us towards the objective of Dog Mediated Rabies Elimination by 2030. She mentions in her message that, "These guidelines are in line with recent WHO TRS 1012 and to further strengthen animal bites and rabies surveillance, standard case definitions have been introduced under IDSP. Also "National Action Plan for Rabies Elimination" in India with ONE health approach is being prepared."

The focus of the guidelines is easy availability of Rabies Biologicals round the clock and their prudent/ cost effective use by using Intradermal Rabies Vaccination (IDRV) and wound only infiltration of rabies Immunoglobulins (RIG), except in certain conditions. While cost effective and vaccine saving updated Thai Red Cross Schedule (2-2-2-0-2) of IDRV has been recommended, the recommended schedule of five injections Essen Regimen of (1-1-1-1-1) may lead to vaccine wastages leading to vaccine shortages in small and private clinics as WHO and CDC recommend only four dose schedule.

Another important omission in the guidelines is consumption of "Raw Milk" need not to be given Rabies PEP. Consumption of Raw Milk in villages becomes a social and political emergency leading to stock outs of all available rabies vaccine in government and private institutions.

Welcome inclusion is Annexures especially Animal Bite Exposure Register, PEP treatment Card, Guidance for preventing shortages of Rabies

biologicals, case definitions for Human Rabies for IDSP and most importantly FAQs. All this makes this document a valuable guide for treating physicians all over the country where many of them are still not aware of many new advances in animal bite treatment so that deaths due to rabies can be prevented effectively. Document could have listed some of the important further reading and references for those who may like to read more on the subject.

The "National Action Plan for Rabies Elimination" is a real hope for rabies free India by 2030 and emphasizes on intersectoral coordination between Human Health sectors and Animal health sectors, need for lab strengthening and legislations. Preparing yearly targeted "Activity matrix and Road Map" for Zero Rabies Deaths by 2030 for both Human and animal sectors, so that continuous monitoring can help us plug the holes and lead us to the desired target of rabies free India by 2030. Defining the role of different stake holders and strictly following the responsibilities given can help us reap the desired benefits of Rabies control as dog mediated rabies is not only life threatening to Human beings but many cattle die of untimely death due to rabies putting their owners into a debt trap. For the new strategies to have efficient Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) for animals bitten by rabid dogs need to be in place contrary to the belief of the WHO that does not advocate use of PEP in domestic animals. Also new strategies of dog vaccination need to be thought of because of huge density and population of dogs in a country like India.

With the able leadership of NCDC, we are optimistic that we would achieve rabies free India by 2030.