

World Hepatitis Day: Role of International Institute of Health Management Research, New Delhi and Similar Academic Institutions

Dr.Sanjiv Kumar, Director, IIHMR-New Delhi

28th July is celebrated as World Hepatitis Day to address one of the major public health problems which affects countries all over the world. This is in honour of Nobel laureate Baruch Samuel Blumberg, discoverer of Hepatitis B who was born on 28 July. Globally 1.34 million deaths take place annually due to hepatitis (equal to HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria put together). This number is increasing. Around 1.75 million people were newly infected in 2015 and total number of infected is 71 million. 257 million people are living with Hepatitis B infection. Hepatitis B and C viruses account for 80% of liver cancers. Hepatitis B can be prevented with an effective vaccine and treatment is available for both Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C. Hepatitis B vaccine which became available in 1982 and is 95% effective. Three doses of this vaccine were given to 84% of new-borns and it has brought down the prevalence of infection in under-five children from 4.7% to 1.3%. Unsafe injections contribute to spread of hepatitis.

Hepatitis is now recognised as a major public health problem and needs urgent action. Celebration of World Hepatitis Day is one step to increase awareness and advocate for urgent action to eliminate Hepatitis. The theme of this year is Eliminate Hepatitis. A Global Health Sector Strategy (2016-21) is available to do so.

Academic Institutions like International Institute of Health Management Research, New Delhi which impart health management education, in-service training and research can play an important role in moving towards elimination of Hepatitis infections in our country. These actions can be grouped in the following three categories:

1. Students Health and Academic Activities:
 - a. Teaching: All MBA students need to be educated. The course on National Health Programmes must include Hepatitis as a public health programme and covered. This can also be given as one of the topics for summer assignment in the first year and dissertation in second year.
 - b. Students Health: They need to be educated as to what they can do to protect their own health. Education of students on prevention, their own screening and management of those with the virus.
 - c. Change agents for their families, relatives and in their social circle.
2. In-service training courses: Plan and conduct in-service training courses on National Health Programmes including Hepatitis or separate courses on Hepatitis.
3. Operational Research: Conduct operational research to scale up interventions to reach every beneficiary. And accelerate progress towards elimination of Hepatitis in the country.

The role of academic institutions like IIHMR is vital to support elimination of Hepatitis in the country. These institutions need to work closely with the government, other academic institutions, civil society organizations and other stake holders.