

Polio Eradication - The Way Forward

Despite remarkable decline in the number of poliomyelitis cases, the dream of polio eradication in India is elusive. This is despite considerable efforts and expenditure for well over a decade. Various reasons are being studied and corrective actions are being implemented by the Government of India along with Rotary International, WHO and UNICEF. While most of the problems have been tackled, the 107 blocks where this virus still lurks is posing a challenge to the programme managers.

The National PolioPlus Orientation and Planning Meet held on May 19th and 20th, 2010 at Hotel Le Meridien, New Delhi, had a relook at the polio eradication strategies in order to learn from past errors and determine feasible solutions to achieve the goal.

This annual event, which is normally held during August, was advanced to May this year with a view to educate the District Governor-elects before they begin their busy schedule in July. This change is expected to bring in the desired results as the district leaders have been charged with the responsibility to give the final push and eliminate polio during the year 2010–2011.

India National PolioPlus Committee Chairman, PDG Deepak Kapur highlighted the 107 blocks where the virus is still posing a challenge. Dr. Hamid Jafari, Project Manager, NPSP-WHO said that every person had to play his role in eliminating the virus. Out of the 20 cases that were reported till that date, 3 were type I cases and this called for strengthening the routine immunisation programme. The agony of PRIP Raja Saboo was evident. He said, “I had boasted about the polio eradication



IPPC Chair Dr. Robert S Scott addressing at the PolioPlus Orientation Meet.

programme in India. We were even critical about the programme in the neighbouring countries. But they got the better of us. If you Rotarians do not do it, others will do it. We should not be having this meeting every year. Forget about petty politics in your district. Concentrate on this job of polio eradication. If you fail, media will ignore you.” Chairman of the International PolioPlus Committee, PRID Robert S Scott was hopeful that India could meet the deadlines by next year. He said that US \$ 124 million had been collected till date for the Bill & Melinda Gates Challenge Grant. RIPN Kalyan Banerjee said that focus should be on RI Districts 3010, 3100, 3110, 3120 and 3250 and steps should be initiated to report new births and also provide mobile phones to the workers who were going on foot from house to house in these areas. He said that they would be able to communicate with the managers effectively through the mobile phones and steps could be

taken to immunise every child in every household. The need to implement the ORS & Zinc programme was also stressed. Mr. Amit Mohan Prasad, IAS, Joint secretary, Ministry of Health said that the Government will always support Rotary International in this battle against polio.

It is apparent to everyone that we are presently at a critical stage of polio eradication and a thorough re-appraisal of the situation is called for. The sessions conducted by the members of the national committee would have inspired the delegates and removed any doubts they would have had. It is now our time to act.



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