All IMA members should trace every positive HIV person

*It is imperative to start ART irrespective of CD count or clinical stage once a person is tested HIV positive*

New Delhi, 18 May, 2017: According to statistics, out of the 21 lakh people with HIV in India, only 14 lakh are on the registry. About two-thirds of people with HIV/AIDS die due to lack of access to antiretroviral drugs (ART). With these statistics as the basis, the IMA has adopted government 90:90:90 strategy: to identify 90% of those infected, place 90% of them on treatment, and ensure 90% have the virus under control. This is a part of IMA's commitment on “ending AIDS by 2030” in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As per the new policy, ART will be provided to anyone tested and found positive for AIDS, irrespective of CD count or the clinical stage they are in. This policy is being propagated in a big way by IMA and is also being practiced by the private sector.

Speaking about this pertinent issue, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr R N Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, "It is a fact that a majority of people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in India lack access to the initial and most important phase of treatment. This policy being adopted is for all men, women, adolescents, and children who have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. It will improve the lifespan and quality of life of those infected, and save them from many opportunistic infections, especially TB. These benefits begin even when ART is started in early HIV infection, reducing the risk of HIV transmission as well. This collective step by IMA is a small step towards the larger goal of ensuring access to ART for all and achieving the target of ending AIDS by 2030."

ART is an effective way of suppressing serum viral RNA levels and increasing CD4 cell counts in the vast majority of patients with acute and early HIV infection. Initiation of ART earlier after initial HIV infection can help in immune reconstitution to normal or near normal CD4 cell levels.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "In India, ART has been available since 2004. At ART clinics, HIV positive people have access to HTC, nutritional advice, and treatment for HIV and opportunistic
infections. The need of the hour is for initiatives that can help provide a larger access to ART for those infected with HIV."

People with AIDS still face much discrimination and stigma in the society. Although, India’s treatment programme is an example to the world of what can be achieved through committed collaboration, there is still a long way to go. Much has been learnt from the past experiences and it is important to continue building on the strong foundation created. Free ART, along with care and support services will ensure timely treatment and a positive outcome on this front.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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