

## Foreword

When Dr Robert Koch announced his discovery of the TB bacillus on 24 March 1882 in Berlin, TB was raging through Europe and the Americas, killing one in seven people. Koch's discovery marked a big progress in the human history on fighting tuberculosis. However, effective anti-TB drugs did not appear until the 1950s. In the past 110 years, TB has claimed the lives of at least 200 million people. It kills 3 million people a year even today.

The WHO and the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (IUATLD) sponsored the first World TB Day in 1982 to raise public awareness of the disease. In 1998, due to the global escalation of the TB epidemics, World TB Day was observed as an official United Nations Day for the first time. Activities on this day is not for celebration. World TB Day is a time to mobilize public support for an intensified effort to diagnose and cure TB on a global scale.

In the last 50 or so years, Taiwan has made remarkable efforts in the control of tuberculosis, and tuberculosis has been brought under effective control. However, tuberculosis is still one of the most important communicable diseases in Taiwan. The number of newly registered tuberculosis patients in 1998 totaled 14,169, which was twice as many as the total number of reported cases of all other communicable diseases in that year. In 1998, 1,513 persons died of tuberculosis, which was close to the total number of deaths of all other communicable diseases in the same year. Of all communicable diseases, the impact of tuberculosis on the economy and government reputation is the most serious. The many features of tuberculosis make the control of tuberculosis more difficult than other communicable diseases. They are as follows:

1. Tuberculosis is airborne, anyone who breathes has the chance of being infected;
2. The incubation period is long, infection may occur or recur at any time of life;
3. Symptoms are not distinct, medical care may thus be delayed;
4. Symptoms are not specific, diagnosis may thus be delayed, and treatment inadequate;
5. The disease is of long duration, unless properly treated, half of all patients will die in five years; one-fifth of patients are still capable of spreading bacilli after five years;

- 6 .Treatment of infected patients is the best prevention in the spread of tuberculosis; treatment of tuberculosis, however, takes as long as six to nine months; patients often discontinue treatment when symptoms disappeared;
- 7 .Inadequate treatment or interrupted medication often results in untreatable drug resistance;
- 8 .Delay in diagnosis, delay in medical care, interrupted medication, and inadequate treatment will prolong the patients;| period of communicability, and result in the spread of infection and an increased number of cases of T.B.
- 9.No effective vaccines against tuberculosis are as yet available;
- 10.Tuberculosis is more prevalent in underprivileged groups, the seriousness of the disease is, therefore, often overlooked.

Early diagnosis, adequate treatment, and continued observation of patients throughout the entire course of treatment are some key points in the prevention and control of tuberculosis. The control of tuberculosis is a long process; it cannot be accomplished overnight. Facing the double crucial challenges of worldwide pandemics of tuberculosis and the issues of multi-drug resistant TB in the 21st century, the prevention and control of tuberculosis in Taiwan should have the concerted efforts of all concerned for a new impetus. The prevention and control of tuberculosis is presently the most important and urgent issue in the policy planning of disease control in Taiwan. Disease control workers of all agencies concerned should regard the seriousness of this problem, face the challenge, and collaborate in the fight against tuberculosis.

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