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ARE WE STILL LAGGING BEHIND IN PREVENTING BLINDNESS IN PATIENTS WITH OCULAR LEPROSY IN POST ELIMINATION ERA?

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Introduction: Frequency and severity of ocular involvement in cases of leprosy is directly proportional to the duration, degree of advancement of the disease and the treatment status of the patient. On account of lengthy duration of the illness, it invariably produces ocular disabilities. Visual impairment culminating in total loss of vision is a major tragedy in the life of a patient with leprosy. This visual disability is to a large extent preventable; provided the ocular involvement is diagnosed at an early stage and appropriate measures are undertaken in time. It should be realized that loss of vision is the same handicap to the patient, whether due to leprosy or to other causes not related to leprosy. Severe visual impairment or blindness may hamper or preclude self-care and is, therefore, more disabling in leprosy patients than in the general population. Blindness for leprosy patients is really a disaster. They completely depend on eye sight to protect their often anaesthetic limbs from injuries and burns.

Methods & Materials: This is an observational prospective study involving 150 patients suffering from leprosy who attended ophthalmic outpatient department from Jan' 2017 to June' 2017 in TLM Community Hospital Shahadara. Complete ophthalmic examination was performed and patients were classified according to ocular pathology.

Observation: A total of 150 consecutive leprosy patients attending their ophthalmic visit were examined, out of which 30 patients were blind in one eye (20%) and 10 patients were blind in both the eyes (6.6%). Visual acuity of 6/18 was present in 60 patients (40%). A total of 90 patients (60%) had an ocular complication and 30 patients (20%) had a sight-threatening leprosy complication (lagophthalmos, severe corneal, or iris disease). The most common ocular complications were impaired lid closure (28 patients, 18.66%), impaired corneal sensation (24 patients, 16%), cataract (30 patients, 20%), mild corneal opacity (40 patients, 26.66%), and iritis (20 patients, 13.33%). Impaired corneal sensation was associated with vision <6/18 (16 patients, 10.66%) and vision <3/60 (12 patients, 8%). Impaired lid closure was significantly associated with increasing age and vision <3/60 (14 patients, 9.3%).

Conclusion: There is a significant rate of ocular complications and blindness seen in leprosy patients, and over one in five had a potentially sight-threatening ocular complication. Health professionals and all leprosy patients, including those cured of the disease need to be aware that new eye symptoms and signs require prompt ophthalmology review to prevent avoidable blindness, due to the life-long risk of sight-threatening ocular complications

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