A pledge for hope…

World Day against AIDS provides us an excellent opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to fight against this infection. This is a time when all of us show our solidarity with those who have been struggling to cope with this virus, and raise awareness amongst those who may still be ignorant about human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV.

It has been almost three decades that mankind has been grappling with this fatal virus. Several measures to control the spread and limit the severity of this disease are now available. It would not be wrong to say that combating HIV and AIDS is one of the largest public health challenges in modern history.

The good news in Uttar Pradesh is that the number of cases of new HIV infections is not rising. At least, not alarmingly. The program seems to be on track, and the people are able to access services. However, this is not the time to be complacent. We know that some people are still not aware where to get their HIV test done. These centres, known as the ICTC (Integrated counselling and Testing Centre) are now operational in all the District Hospitals, Medical Colleges and selected Community Health Centres (CHCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in the state. Whenever in doubt, it is as easy to test to know your HIV status.

However, a greater challenge remains. The Government of Uttar Pradesh recognizes that children affected by HIV and AIDS are amongst the most vulnerable in the society. These children are neglected and discriminated against in the family, in the community, in schools, hospitals and other service providers. And anti-retroviral treatment

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How can ART prevent mother to child transmission of HIV?

If a pregnant woman does have HIV, first the doctors check to see if she needs treatment (ART) herself. If she does need ART, then this is a very good way to make sure that her baby will not get the HIV. If she does not need ART herself, the doctors will need to have her ARV medicines during the pregnancy, the delivery and during breast-feeding to prevent the HIV from being passed to the baby.

HIV positive women wanting to get pregnant are advised to do so in consultation with health care provider to reduce the likelihood of their baby becoming infected. All pregnant women should be made aware of the possibility of HIV and syphilis after informed consent is obtained.

What other kinds of care do people living with HIV need?

Psychosocial support and counseling are extremely important for people living with HIV and AIDS. They have fundamental human rights as that of any other person and therefore should be treated with respect and without any judgmental attitude, especially from the health care providers and other care givers. In addition to access to HIV treatment, good nutrition, safe water, basic hygiene and other important elements of care can help maintain a high quality of life for a person living with HIV.

What is the impact of stigma and discrimination against children and people living with or affected by AIDS?

Children and adults living with HIV and AIDS: Being positive can be confusing for people living with HIV and syphilis and other people, HIV positive individuals are forced to hide their status, miss out on life-saving treatment, counseling and other forms of support.

Stigmatization of HIV positive individuals creates them and prevents them from seeking information, treatment, counseling, and treatment for related conditions. HIV-related stigma, like racism, homophobia, discrimination against women or any type of discriminatory attitude, has no place in the any just and equitable society.

What are the social protection schemes available for women and children affected by HIV and AIDS?

There are some Govt. of India Welfare schemes for women and children, living with or affected by AIDS. These include prenatal and postnatal care, food security, health care, family and community support, educational and vocational training, and income generation activities.

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