

Ray of hope for 5 'TDR' tuberculosis patients

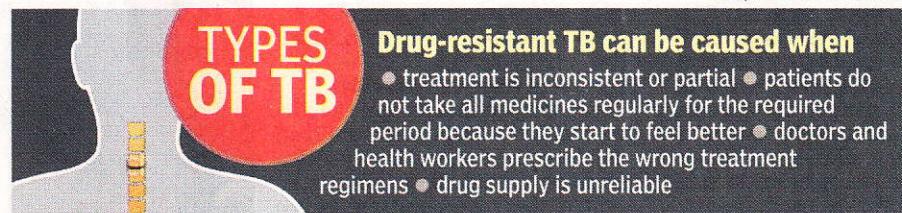
Graphic: Yamini Panchal

Sputum of five patients tests negative for TB

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

For the first time in five years, Rashida (name changed) has some good news to savour: her sputum has tested negative for the tubercle bacillus. Tuberculosis and its resistant forms had over time reduced the once hyperactive mother of two to a helpless patient. She was confined to bed; her husband had to sell a portion of his farmland in UP's Deveria village to finance her treatment and they moved in to a chawl in Mumbai. Rashida was one of the 12 patients who, while under treatment with Hinduja Hospital doctors, was labelled with totally drug-resistant (TDR) TB. Besides Rashida, four others have tested negative for TB in their sputum, but have to wait for their sputum culture test before they can celebrate.

In January, the Hinduja team published a letter in the Clinical Infectious Diseases (CID) journal about the tuberculosis patients who were resistant to most known TB drugs. A lot of TB management has changed in Mumbai since then. Rashida



TDR-VERSUS-XDR

- On World TB Day on March 24, the World Health Organisation announced that it isn't yet time to give up on TB treatment. In other words, the label of totally drug-resistant tuberculosis would be premature.
- The WHO held a consensus meeting of experts from several countries and decided that the TDR-TB label was, in a manner of speaking, misleading because it suggested that no drugs were available for such patients.
- There are some salvage drugs—a term for high-end antibiotics that were not conventionally used for TB treatment—that helped some patients.

patients were labelled XXDR-TB (extra-extensively drug-resistant). In Mumbai, patients have access to diagnosis and treatment. BMC's first TB officer Dr Minni Khetrapal said patients of multi drug-resistant TB and eight of extra-extensively drug-resistant TB are on their direct treatment. The eight XDR patients in the original Hinduja hospital's 12 patients. Our officers are in weekly touch with them; they are doing well, he said.

to the state TB department on Monday. "The DOTS-plus (Directly Observed Treatment Shortcourse) team will discuss the report on Wednesday," said state TB officer Dr P Gaikwad. The validation will change little

their patients. Three of the original 12 patients who were diagnosed with TDR-TB died. A central team that flew down to Mumbai held that the cases were extra-extensively drug-resistant TB (XXDR-TB) and not TDR-TB.

BMC officials said that two of these patients were still sensitive to one second-line drug. State TB officer Dr Gaikwad said: "This shows that immunity of the host (patient) also matters, not just the drug sensitivity to the bacteria."

If Rashida were to return to UP, the revised TB programme will ensure that her treatment—costing the government nearly Rs 5 lakh—will be available to her. "TDR is not untreatable," said Dr Udwadia. "Five of the 12 pa-

tients seem to be making progress," he said, adding that two were not doing too well. "With only six months of the two-year treatment complete, it's premature to talk of them being cured." A senior doctor said the XXDR-

TB patients were given "salvage drugs" that have severe side-effects. "One of the drugs is used for skin and soft tissue infection. They may be responding to it now, but can they take it for 18 more months?" the doctor asked.