

UN Reports on Rise in Tuberculosis in Africa

by Leni Rubinstein

A recently released report from the UN World Health Organization (WHO), “The Global Tuberculosis Control Study for 2005,” reveals that tuberculosis has reached alarming proportions in Africa, with a growing number of TB cases and deaths linked to HIV.

One of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to achieve by 2015, is to halt and begin to reverse the spread of TB, as one of the world’s major diseases. In a message to the UN’s World TB Day in late March, Secretary General Kofi Annan said in a message, that much harder work is needed to halt a scourge “both preventable and curable.”

In Africa, 5,000 people are dying from tuberculosis daily, which is a “glaring exception” to a global trend of falling or stabilized rates. Since 1990 the global rates of TB have fallen 20%, and rates are now falling or stable in five of the world’s six regions. The exception is Africa, where the rates have tripled since 1990 in countries with a high number of HIV cases, and the rates are still rising across the continent at a rate of 3-4% annually, according to the report.

If strong commitment and resources are sustained, four regions—The Americas, Eastern Mediterranean, Southeast Asia and Western Pacific—are on track to reach the Millennium Development Goal. The two exceptions are Africa, due to the TB/HIV co-epidemic, and Europe, where there are high levels of multi-drug-resistant TB and slow advances in DOTS in countries of the former Soviet Union. DOTS is the internationally recommended strategy to control TB, and combines five elements: political commitment, microscopy services, drug supplies, surveillance and monitoring systems, and the use of highly efficient treatment regimes with direct observation of treatment.

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