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JPRS: 4574
28 April 1961

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST TUBERCULOSIS

- Hungary -

By Denes Mosolygo

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FOREWORD

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RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES DIVISION

JPRS: 4574

CSO: 1550-S

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST TUBERCULOSIS

- HUNGARY -

Following is the translation of an article by Denes Mosolygo, Department Head in the Ministry of Health, in Nepszabadsag (People's Freedom), Vol XIX, No 21, Budapest, 25 January 1961, page 2.7

The government decree concerning the extension of the fight against TB was put into effect 1 January 1961. We contacted Dr. Denes Mosolygo, Head of the department responsible for the direction of these operations, and asked him to make a statement regarding the execution of the decree:

(Question:) So far, what results have been achieved in the fight against TB and why was there need for the new Government decree?

(Answer:) As is generally known, before the liberation our country was on top of the list of TB-infected countries and at the bottom in fighting the disease among all European countries. We have made significant progress in the prevention and treatment of the disease during the past 15 years. The drastic reduction in fatality is the most striking achievement. Gradually, in this country too, TB is becoming a disease of older people. Nevertheless, TB must still be considered a mass disease.

(Question:) The rate of new disease cases is around 20,000 annually. There are 140,000 registered TB patients in the country; of these, the number of Koch-positive cases (having caverns) may be estimated at 40,000. What are the reasons for TB still existing as a major disease of the people?

(Answer:) Like other communicable diseases, TB follows a cyclic pattern; there is an ascending phase, an acute phase, and a descending phase. The difference from other epidemics lies in the fact that the phases last for a century or even 200 years, rather than a few weeks or months. The rise of capitalism was accompanied, almost without exception by the appearance of TB. According to Hungarian statistical data, the TB curve reached the high point at the turn of the century. In our country, as compared to Western capitalistic countries, the TB epidemics started rather late, finding conditions exceptionally advantageous to its spread. Since that time, the epidemics had been curbed considerably, but the number of infected and diseased persons is still large. Thus, an extended period of time is necessary to subdue this disease.

(Question:) What are the provisions of the new Government decree and what initial action has been taken toward its execution?

(Answer:) The political, economic, and industrial progress of the country, the socialist reorganization of agriculture, the rising living standards of the population, and, last but not least the 15-year housing development plan are the assurances for the eventual complete eradication of TB.

The major objectives of the long-range plan are as follows: the BCG-vaccination of the entire population under age 30; the screening of the entire population, first at two-year intervals, later annually; the further large-scale development of in-patient and out-patient facilities for TB patients; increased financial assistance to TB-patients; and employment for persons of limited employability.

The responsibility for the fight against TB is not restricted to a special service force but must be assumed by all members of the medical profession and, indeed, by the Hungarian nation.

This is the basic reason for the need for a government decree regulating the tasks of state and community organizations as well as the rights and responsibilities of the citizens, among them the TB-patients themselves. Social and cultural conditions play an important part in the struggle against TB. These include: living and working conditions, housing, and the educational standards of the population. Plants and collectives may do much to create healthy working conditions and in assisting to offer suitable employment to TB patients. The prevention of cattle-TB contamination is a responsibility to be assumed by the workers of state and collective farms, and of the animal health service system.

The provisions of the decree call for an annual survey and a plan for carrying out local tasks of the TB-campaign by all territorial councils.

All TB-outpatient clinics will be assisted by a community committee, sponsored by the Red Cross, to promote voluntary participation by the citizens. The decree orders that all TB-connected medical examinations and treatment, including hospitalization, be free of charge to everybody. Thus, general social insurance is now in effect as regards TB. Patients in the low income bracket, primarily those with dependents, receive financial assistance in addition to sick pay.

The execution of the government decree calls for tremendous efforts on the part of the State. Several billions of forints will have to be expended in the ten years ahead for the stepped-up TB program. This in itself, however, is not sufficient. The law aims at whole-sale mobilization of the entire society in such a way that each and every Hungarian citizen become aware of a personal responsibility to participate in the struggle against this grave mass disease.

(Question:) What improvements may be expected in the years ahead in suppressing TB?

(Answer:) The progress and past achievements of medical science in our country justify optimism. At this point, TB has become an illness that can be prevented and treated, and consequently eliminated.

For example, the effectiveness of the compulsory TB screening examinations is much greater than 10-15 years ago, since TB spotted at an

early stage can now be cured in almost 100 per cent of the cases. This is why we attach such high hopes to the results of the government decree. The fight against TB will require great sacrifices and strenuous efforts on the part of our health system for a long time yet.

More and greater results will come about only with years of arduous work. For this, a considerably increased health network is needed, as well as the support of state and community organizations and of the population in general.

We, the workers of the health system, are inspired in this work by the prospect of freeing our people from TB, this retreating, but still destructive, disease.