

Printed from

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Recalling man who put Chennai on TB research map

TNN | Mar 24, 2018, 12.31 AM IST



CHENNAI: As reams of data on tuberculosis and India's failure to eliminate the disease were doled out along with promising research studies on diagnosis and treatment on the eve of International Day for Tuberculosis, Chennai's National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis decided to begin its programme with a memorial to its founder, Dr Wallace Fox.

In 1956, Dr Fox came to India and started the Tuberculosis Chemotherapy Centre to compare home treatment with sanatorium treatment. The results showed no advantage for a sanatorium group, and no added risk of infection for the family of those treated at home. This opened up vast savings, particularly for patients in developing countries. "That's when we stopped sending all patients with TB into sanatoriums. He recommended a stringent drug regimen and tracked patients to their homes," said NIRT

director Dr Srikant Prasad Tripathy.

Dr Fox was himself a victim of TB, and stayed at the British Royal Infirmary for nearly two years. "To monitor patients treated at home, he introduced pill counts and surprise urine tests," said the institute's former director Dr S Radhakrishna, who released a book 'Prof Wallace Fox –A Pioneer in TB Research' published by institute. For many young scientists, Fox put Chennai on the map as a premier city for TB research. Chennai is the only Indian city that is part of the zero-TB initiative to bring the global TB epidemic into the elimination phase by focusing on government participation. "Our institute is collaborating with the Greater

Chennai Corporation and the non-profit Reach to ensure the disease is detected early and treated correctly,” said epidemiologist Dr Sriram Selvaraju.

In the past few months, the Chennai corporation has been working towards active case finding instead of waiting for patients to visit doctors with symptoms. “Teams will organise camps and screen people for symptoms. This test will also tell us if the bacteria is resistant to antibiotics. If not, we will give them the regular six-month regimen or put them on the second line treatment for one-and-a-half years,” he said.

The team will conduct a TB prevalence study in Chennai soon. The Chennai centre has begun research on whole genome sequencing.