



Care and Concern Camp in Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh

and was completely cured. In all that time, the only stigma he suffered was in his own heart.

As a result of his experiences, Mr. Shrivastav was moved to fund a Kushta Kantha Nivaram Karkyram camp in his district. Known in English as a Care and Concern Camp, it helps to reduce the physical and mental suffering of those with leprosy. Since 2003, he has organized three such camps from his own home, at which those who have lost feeling in their hands and feet receive treatment for injuries, and are given a warm welcome by the local community. He also appears before the media to tell his story.

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I have always felt that the most effective way to rid society of stigma and discrimination is for recovered persons to come together and lead the fight. Every word uttered by a recovered person is ten times more persuasive than anything I might say. In Mr. Shrivastav's case, he is not merely speaking up but extending a hand to patients and recovered persons. I am inspired by his example.

Listening to his story, I was reminded of the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "Leprosy work is not



WHO's Dr. Derek Lobo addresses the Advocacy Meet in Hyderabad.

merely medical relief, it is transforming frustration in life into the joy of dedication, personal ambition into selfless service."

While in Hyderabad, I visited the Uppal Public Health Center in Ranga Reddy District. There I met about 20 leprosy patients as well as some 40 student nurses from the Yashoda School of Nursing and the Kamineni School of Nursing. As the student nurses and PHC workers looked on, I handed out MDT from blister packs to the 20 or so patients — ranging in age from children to adults — who swallowed their dose in front of us as if taking cold medicine. It reinforced the impression that leprosy is just another curable disease, and this is something that I hope will stay in the minds of those student nurses when they have occasion to meet leprosy patients in future.

Elsewhere in Ranga Reddy District, I visited the Sivananda Rehabilitation Home, which proved to be another unforgettable experience. It was started in 1958 as a rehabilitation facility for those with leprosy. At present, it is home to some 500 recovered persons, including some with families.



Scene from Sivananda Rehabilitation Home

The facility includes a school for residents' children, a hospital for basic reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation, and workshops for spinning, weaving and shoe manufacture.

I went from dwelling to dwelling and met about 200 recovered persons, shaking hands with each. The experience brought home the importance of early diagnosis and treatment, since it was apparent that even if social discrimination were to disappear, it would still be difficult for those with severe disabilities to be socially reintegrated. For this to happen, everybody needs to know that leprosy is curable, treatment is free and that they won't face discrimination. At the same time, it is essential that treatment of leprosy is integrated within the general health services.

Even though leprosy is curable, only when people have early access to treatment will it be possible to do away with such colonies. I am resolved to continue the fight so that those who have been treated can live normal lives where they were born, surrounded by friends and family. ■