

cured persons, giving participating media the opportunity to get to know first-hand the stories of those whose lives have been affected by the disease, the struggles they have faced and how they have coped.

At time of writing, sessions have been held in Kolkata (110 participants); Patna (120); Guwahati (75); and Lucknow (170), with more sessions planned for Chennai, Jaipur, Ranchi, Ahmedabad, and Pune.

Among those taking part have been government health department officials, representatives of WHO, ILU, IDEA India, local NGOs and ILEP agencies, cured persons, local representatives from most major newspapers and television stations, and contingents from the leading media schools in the state.

Coverage of the workshops has generally been good, often featuring interviews with the WHO goodwill ambassador as well as leprosy activists such as Dr P. K. Gopal (IDEA India) and Dr S. D. Gokhale (ILU).



The goodwill ambassador (right) meets the Indian media

REACTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

Archiman Bhaduri, a senior journalist with *The Times of India* in Kolkata, said that until he attended the Kolkata workshop, stories about leprosy had never been a topic of interest because they don't sell the next day's newspapers. "But the workshop opened my eyes to some harsh facts about our society. It also made me realize there are some very positive stories out there."

He said he appreciated the opportunity to speak both with cured persons and those working closely with them, and said that the workshop brought home to him the truth of the statement: "Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives."

Aneeta Tewari, senior sub-editor of the *Hindustan Times* Lucknow edition, was assigned to cover the workshop held in that city. "Initially it

seemed like a routine assignment," she said, "but the workshop provided me with a new insight and objective in life."

Exposure to the work of the WHO goodwill ambassador "shook my conscience as an educated journalist," she said. Hearing of the way patients can be disowned by their own family members "made me to decide to contribute my own resources toward eradication of the disease and its associated social stigma."

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She was also inspired by the "shining example" of Dr. Gopal, whose struggle with the disease as a young man interrupted his studies but who went on to become an activist in the worldwide fight against leprosy and discrimination.

From starting out as a routine assignment, Tewari's report grew to fill over one page of her newspaper. "The story aimed at clearing myths about leprosy, providing confidence to affected persons in their fight against the disease and increasing social awareness to dispel the stigma associated with it," she said.

Hitendra K. Patel, a senior lecturer in the Department of History at Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, and executive editor of *The Last Mile* (a magazine to bring awareness of leprosy to India) admits he was not very interested when first introduced to efforts to improve the situation of persons affected by leprosy.

But while acquainting himself with the literature on the subject he came to realize that the equivalent of 1% of India's population has been treated and cured of leprosy over the past two decades. Many of these recovered persons have led a marginalized existence on the fringes of society for no fault of their own, he said, and must be given "all possible help" to lead normal lives.

In that regard, the Kolkata workshop was "a big help for me in understanding different aspects of leprosy stigma," he said, and a meeting with Yohei Sasakawa was "particularly rewarding."

"I am a teacher, and the next time a student affected by leprosy comes to my class, I would treat him as any other student who is affected by a disease. Before attending this workshop I would not have dared to do so," he said. "I think this sums up what I have gained personally from this workshop." ■