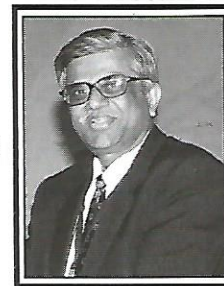


Guest Editorial

## How to reduce the burden of rabies in India ? Popularize intradermal rabies vaccination and promote the use of rabies immunoglobulins by medical professionals

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India has the dubious distinction of having the world's major burden of human rabies mortality, as an estimated 20,000 persons are known to die every year<sup>1</sup> out of the global estimate of 55,000<sup>2</sup>. It is also estimated that about 17 million animal bites occur every year in the country<sup>3</sup>. This is contrary to its image of being one of the growing economies and advances made in the areas of information technology, biotechnology and nuclear sciences. But, some countries in Asia like Thailand, Philippines and Sri Lanka have successfully reduced the burden of rabies in their countries by promoting the use of intradermal rabies vaccination [IDRV] and rabies immunoglobulins [RIGs]<sup>4</sup>.

In India, till 2004 sheep brain vaccine was the main stay of rabies vaccination and the use of rabies immunoglobulins was about 2%<sup>3</sup>. In 2007, Government of India introduced intradermal rabies vaccination to overcome the shortage of rabies vaccines in the government hospitals<sup>5</sup>. But no concerted efforts are made to promote the use of rabies immunoglobulin, which are life saving in severe exposures to rabies<sup>6</sup>. The medical professionals by and large need to be oriented to the correct use of IDRV and RIGs as vast majority are still not aware of both of these and consider rabies prophylaxis and animal bite management of low priority in day to day practice. But rabies being practically 100% fatal and endemic in India, it is important that the combined use of IDRV and RIGs are vigorously promoted in government sector in particular, as vast majority of the poor visit these hospitals.

The APCRI must start participating in the conferences & CME programmes of other

professional associations like Indian Medical Association, Indian Academy of Pediatrics, Associations of Physicians of India and Federation of obstetricians and gynecologists of India for orienting the fellow medical professionals about IDRV and RIGs. The support of pharmaceutical industry and others must be mobilized for this. It is also important that "hands on" training is organized in this regard both in the government and private sectors. The association [APCRI] having defined the morbidity load of rabies and animal bites of the country must now work for its reduction in a concerted and coordinated way, which is the need of the hour. This must be considered as a "sacred act" as it alleviates the suffering of the poor and needy in the country.

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