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N MADHAVAN | [moneylife](#) | Personal Finance Magazine | 19 March 2015



ALERT-India reaches out to persons affected by leprosy even in cases where complete cure is difficult

Leprosy is a disease riddled with misconceptions and shrouded in myths. Patients do not realise that their pale, numb, non-itching patch of skin is, in fact, the first sign of leprosy. In 1975, Antony Samy, as a young aspirant studying social sciences at Mumbai, had witnessed the dismal condition of persons affected by leprosy living in ghettos in one of the suburbs of Mumbai. Soon after acquiring his Master's degree in social welfare administration, he brought together a few like-minded people and founded ALERT-India to detect, treat and cure this disease well before those affected suffer social exclusion. The physical, social and economic suffering that leprosy patients are subjected to motivated Mr Samy (CEO, ALERT-India) to establish the NGO in 1978.

ALERT-India (Association for Leprosy Education, Rehabilitation and Treatment-India), as a voluntary charitable organisation, started its work more than three decades ago with a vision to eradicate leprosy from our country. The NGO's main battle is against superstition and the fear of ostracism that makes patients shy away from acknowledging ailments such as leprosy. Consequently, this age-old disease still lingers in our cities and villages largely due to ignorance and social myths that add to the fear and stigma that surround leprosy.

Over the years, ALERT-India has evolved from a single clinic operating in Vikhroli (a Mumbai suburb) to carrying out leprosy control activities through 125 leprosy referral centres (LRCs) in 14 districts of Maharashtra and one in Chhattisgarh. Each district is divided into blocks and several foundations and corporates, such as State Bank of India, HT Parekh Foundation and All

Cargo Logistics, have chosen to support the leprosy control activities of ALERT-India in selected blocks.

ALERT-India has treated and cured over 48,000 patients of leprosy in the past 36 years. Rehabilitation is provided in several ways—physiotherapy, specialised micro-cellular rubber (MCR) footwear, counselling about self-care as well as educational grants for leprosy-affected or their children. Patients are given treatment, counselling and physiotherapy services free of cost in special clinics where, besides medication, services like skin smear diagnostic facilities are also provided.

Advocacy of patient's rights is also an important and integral part of ALERT-India's work. Several ex-patients or their family members are employed by the organisation. ALERT-India also helps patients to avail government welfare schemes for which they are eligible.

Awareness-building, especially for school and college going children, through audio-visual talks at educational institutions, exhibitions, album talks and community-based education, forms a large part of ALERT-India's activities. CMEs (continuing medical education) as refresher courses on leprosy for doctors are also undertaken. It is important that treatment starts at the earliest stage to prevent deformities. Free medical therapy is provided through the latest MDT (multi drug therapy) regimen which renders the patient non-infectious with the first dose itself.

ALERT-India partners with more than 60 NGOs and CBOs (community-based organisations) from the health and development sector as well as with local self-government (municipal corporations & councils) and the health departments of Maharashtra and the Central government in the fight against leprosy.

Donations to ALERT-India are exempt under Section 80-G of Income-Tax Act.

ALERT-India

Association for Leprosy Education, Rehabilitation & Treatment-India

B-9, Mira Mansion, Sion (West), Mumbai - 400 022, India

Telephone 0091 22 2403 3081-2, 2407 2558, Fax: 24017652

e-mail: alertveera@gmail.com

www.alertindia.org