
GETTING RID OF THE MOSQUITO MENACE - CARRIER OF MANY DISEASES

Mosquitoes have become a serious threat to man's health as they contribute to many diseases of epidemic scale. Dengue, Malaria, Filariasis and Japanese encephalitis are main diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, which have serious impacts both socially and economically. As a mosquito can fly a considerable distance from its place of birth, every person may expose themselves to these diseases creating a threat to public health.

Malaria has caused over one million deaths all over the world, while in Sri Lanka, 115 people have died in North and North East in 1998. There are two types of filariasis in Sri Lanka, namely urban and rural filariasis. There is a long history of filariasis in Sri Lanka, where it has been reported as far back as 339 A.D. At the moment there are over 120 million filariasis patients in the world. Out of these about 76 million patients do not show any symptom of filariasis. Japanese Encephalitis is an important health problem faced by people in many Asian countries. During the last decade this disease has spread in Thailand, Burma, India and Nepal. Annually about 50,000 people in the world acquire this disease and 15,000 people die from it. In Sri Lanka it is prevalent in the dry zone where paddy cultivation is done, and in the wet zone where pigs are reared. Until 1984 this has not been spread in dangerous level. In 1987 it became significant, killing 138 people out of 766 infected people. Encephalitis patients were reported at first in Anuradhapura and later in Polonnaruwa, Kurunegala and Puttalam districts. Dengue, during the year 2000, caused a grave health problem in Sri Lanka. During that year about 5000 patients were reported in the country of which about 400 patients were confirmed as having dengue. Out of the above mentioned diseases, dengue did the greatest damage to the people in our country.

A number of programmes were launched islandwide to control the diseases. Anti-dengue campaign week was announced. Shramadana campaigns to collect and remove refuse, empty tins, king coconut shells, polythene bags were launched at village level. Programmes launched to eradicate mosquito menace involved teachers, pupils and the local villagers where, school children played an important role, as they are more susceptible to Dengue. For the continuation of regular campaign to curtail mosquito menace, the following proposals have been made. Invention of efficient equipment sets, set aside a labour force to remove stagnant water from discarded gem pits, wells, canals and waterways, educate the general public of the danger of mosquito breeding places such as polythene bags, empty king coconut shells, discarded tyres, and lavatory pits. It is possible to reach an everlasting solution by devising schemes to control the mosquitoes before becoming an epidemic.

Prof. Karunaratne has pointed out that it is useful to consider the biological aspects in controlling mosquitoes, and all preventive measures should aim at personal care, house construction and its surrounding and the use of insecticides. Dr Maya Gunasekera has shown that before embarking to use suitable insecticides for the control of carrier mosquitoes in a selected area, it is better to recognize the mosquito varieties in that area and especially in control of malaria vector, DNA technique could be used. Mosquito related research is being conducted by various research institutes and universities in the island. National Science Foundation has granted financial aid for over 20 such research projects. Most of these researches are conducted in areas like mosquito species and their breeding places, recognition of various mosquito varieties, their classification, spreading of diseases and resistance to insecticides etc. It is timely and appropriate to aim most of these projects at controlling the mosquito breeding. Researchers should pay attention to this aspect.

Science Education Committee of National Science Foundation has issued this volume of VIDURAVA on "Mosquito Borne Diseases" thereby creating awareness among school children and the general public, which in turn helps to control the spread of diseases.

Editor
