

Tuberculosis treatment

Civil society anger over handling of patient

She suffers from extensively drug resistant TB but still lives with family despite threat posed

By KIUNDU WAWERU

Civil society groups have protested to the Ministry of Public Health about the threat posed by a woman allegedly suffering from a highly contagious streak of tuberculosis (TB).

They claimed that the woman who suffers from extensively drug resistant TB (XDR-TB) is quarantined in her home in Nairobi, presenting a risk to her family and neighbours.

"A huge public health issue looms," warned civil society organisations in an advisory note sent to four ministers and the Attorney General.

Their protest follows what has been seen as 'casual' treatment of the woman who was diagnosed with XDR-TB in October last year.

"The case has been handled in a

deplorable manner. We demand that the Government recognises the right to health and provides all the necessary medication — at no cost to the patient," said Allan Maleche, Kenya Legal and Ethical Network on HIV and Aids (KELIN) coordinator.

While the woman should be in isolation in a hospital facility, she lives with her kin in a two-bedroom house in a compound with other people. She covers herself with masks provided by the Ministry of Health.

XDR-TB develops when a patient becomes resistant to second line TB drugs that treat Multiple Drug Resistant TB (MDR-TB), which itself develops from resistant to first line TB drugs.

XDR-TB treatment costs about Sh3

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million per year in a span of about 24 to 36 months.

The said patient has been prescribed three drugs that she buys at a cost of Sh16,000 a week, something she struggles with.

"My family has to find Sh16,000 for drugs every week. All I want is for the Government to provide me with all the medicine that I need without making me pay for it," she said.

Over 15 civil society groups, led by KELIN have joined hands to demand that the Government acts swiftly.

Yesterday, the group, including Action Aid International Kenya, Aids Law Project Kenya, Alliance for Care and Prevention of Tuberculosis in Kenya and Health Rights Advocacy Forum gave the advisory note to Beth Mugo, Minister for Public Health and Sanitation.

Copies were also sent to Ministers Anyang Nyong'o (Medical Services), Esther Murugi (Special Programmes), Mutula Kilonzo (Justice and Constitutional Affairs) and the Attorney General Githu Muigai.

Maleche adds that while one of Kenya's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to reduce the incidence and mortality due to TB by 2015



Beth Mugo



Anyang Nyong'o

CONCERNS RAISED IN ADVISORY NOTE TO GOVERNMENT

The inability of the Government to guarantee a sustained supply of drugs to the patient.

The prescription of medicine (Viomycin) to a patient that is not available locally.

Absence of national guidelines on the management of XDR-TB patients.

The incomplete construction of an isolation ward for MDR-TB and XDR-TB patients.

and to eradicate it completely by 2050 the Government was not doing enough.

"The Government is not addressing TB with the level of seriousness it deserves, particularly as it is a matter concerning the individual, community, national and global public health," he said.

The note highlights the case of two other patients diagnosed with XDR-TB in 2010 and 2011, both of whom died.

They also urged the government to

provide the medicine, *Viomycin*, which is not available in Kenya.

Efforts to reach Mugo and Nyong'o for comment were unsuccessful.

In June 2010, the first known XDR-TB patient in Kenya lost her life nine months after she was diagnosed.

At the time, the patient was placed under treatment at the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital in Eldoret.

The same year, two TB patients who had stopped taking their medication were committed to eight months in prison causing an uproar.