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Kerala's HIV positive coming forward to seek treatment

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Thiruvananthapuram, May 9 (IANS) More and more HIV positive people in Kerala are approaching hospitals for treatment thanks to awareness campaigns launched by the state government.

Currently 4,500 HIV positive people are taking treatment in hospitals - up from around 1,600 last year, according to figures from five medical colleges in Kerala.

The Kozhikode Medical College is treating the most number of HIV positive patients - 1,800, including 20 children in the age group one to 12.

Public health expert C.R. Soman said the fact that more HIV positive people are approaching hospitals for treatment is a very positive development.

'According to official figures, Kerala today has more than 25,000 HIV positive cases. The need of the hour is to see that the government, through an aggressive campaign, gets each one of these HIV positive people to take medical treatment,' Soman told IANS.

Sheela Mathew, a doctor, said the main reason for more HIV positive people seeking treatment is because of the awareness campaigns launched by the government.

'If affected people take treatment, their quality of life improves. The sooner society takes a considerate view of the HIV affected, the better it is,' said Mathew, who heads the Kozhikode Medical College's HIV/AIDS treatment department.

As part of its awareness campaign, the Kerala government has made Malayalam superstar Mohanlal the state's goodwill ambassador for an AIDS awareness campaign.

A two-minute promo film on AIDS awareness shows Mohanlal interacting with an HIV-positive person to drive home the message that 'in life there is no retake'.

Education Minister M.A. Baby had last year taken a tough stance against a school in Kottayam that turned out five HIV positive children. He held meetings with the villagers who opposed the presence of the five students and convinced them to allow the children to attend school.

The Kerala diaspora is also doing its bit. Omana Gangadharan, who last year became the first Indian to don the prestigious Civic Ambassador's chain and badge worn by the speakers of municipal corporations in England, brought Rs.10,000 collected by children of the Langdon School in West Ham for an NGO in Kottayam working among the HIV positive.

The Thiruvananthapuram-based Gemson Trust is all set to produce a 100-minute film on the subject. The trust's main objective is to provide support and care for HIV/AIDS affected single women and orphans.

A.K. Antony, when he was chief minister in 2001-04, had pushed for free anti-retroviral drugs to all HIV positive people.

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