

## 'Stamping' out AIDS and cancer

Here's a scientist who strives to spread awareness and eventually 'stamp' out cancer and AIDS in a unique way - by collecting stamps from across the globe!

Utpal Sanyal, senior scientific officer and head of the department of Anti-Cancer Drug Development, Kolkata, is a man with a mission. He has collected 325 anti-cancer stamps and 160 anti-AIDS stamps from 68 countries till date - all with one aim: to spread awareness about these two diseases.

'I have been collecting stamps, not on any particular theme, since 1964. In 1994, I attended the 16th UICC International Cancer Congress held for the first time in India to present our scientific work on new anti-cancer agents, Sanyal, 57, told IANS on phone from Kolkata.

'A special commemorative stamp was issued by the Indian Postal Department to mark the memorable occasion. Then I met a foreign delegate there collecting anti-cancer stamps, seeing which made me realise that various stamps from various countries on subjects such as cancer were actually quite informative on different aspects of the disease and could teach people in an interesting way.'

At the conference Sanyal was also informed about a paper published in 1978 on anti-cancer stamps in 'CA-A Journal for Clinicians' in the US. With no internet facility on hand, he then visited the Philatelic Museum of the [Kolkata](#) General Post Office and spent the next few weeks paying regular visits to read all about anti-cancer stamps.

'After that I tried to look for those stamps and collected a few of them from dealers in Kolkata. But instead of restricting myself simply to collecting stamps on cancer, I decided to broaden my horizon.

'There are three well-known facts - that cancer is directly linked to tobacco use, AIDS patients are prone to developing various cancers and cancer patients often need blood. Thus, I also started collecting stamps on those themes - anti-tobacco, anti-AIDS and blood donation,' Sanyal said.

There are more than three million cancer patients in the country. According to the Mahavir Cancer Sansthan (MCS) which works with cancer patients, nearly a million new cases get added to this number every year, of which 700,000 die.

Since it's an established fact that diet has a vital role to play in the prevention of one-third of all cancers - for instance, both Vitamins A and C possess cancer chemo-preventive properties, Sanyal has collected 150 stamps on such food items telling people that consuming these can help them fight the disease.

'I am also creating AIDS awareness through anti-AIDS stamps. My pioneer work in this field entitled 'Fight AIDS with AIDS - Role of Anti-AIDS stamps' on HIV/AIDS prevention was published in the most widely circulated AIDS journal, 'AIDS 20' in 2006.

'This is regarded as the first paper in the world on the above subject. It is also interesting to find that since its publication, it has been occupying the top spot in Google search under the heading anti-AIDS stamps,' Sanyal said with pride.

According to the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), the total number of HIV/AIDS cases in India is 2.5 million.

Besides those on the anti-cancer and anti-AIDS topics, Sanyal has collected 75 stamps on the anti-tobacco theme from 46 countries and 110 stamps on blood donation from 56 countries.

And, of course, he has some favourites. Among his anti-cancer stamps collection, Sanyal particularly likes a French stamp issued in 1970 that shows a smiling lady cured of cancer and overcoming the threat of death.

In the anti-tobacco effort, his favourite is a stamp with the world famous painting of a skull with burning cigarette by Vincent Van Gogh on it, issued by a small country St. Tome and amp; Principe.

A stamp issued by Lesotho, which depicts unity in fighting against AIDS and not those who suffer from it, is his favourite among the anti-AIDS stamps and in blood donation, he loves an Indian stamp which shows blood flowing from a full heart to an empty one.

'Collecting stamps is not merely a hobby. I have been conducting cancer and anti-tobacco awareness programmes for several years in the capacity of an individual and as joint principal investigator, Tobacco Cessation Clinic (TCC), Kolkata.

'Since August 2002, about 75 such programmes have been conducted. We find that a presentation comprising only tables and charts can be boring for everybody. Hence we have prepared special PowerPoint presentations that contain those stamps on all those four themes. Those colourful presentations are understood easily by everybody and ultimately serve the purpose of spreading awareness on the diseases,' Sanyal said.

*Azera Rahman* ( © IANS / India eNews)