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ELURU SUFFERS A MYSTERIOUS ILLNESS

Ms. Kali Sruthi Evangeline

The number of people admitted to the Government General Hospital in Eluru with symptoms of a mystery illness increased on 5th December 2020, even as health officials seemed to be clueless in diagnosing it. About 270 people, including 46 children, were hospitalised by

the afternoon of 5th December. Around 70 people were discharged from the hospital after their condition became stable. A 45-year old man from Vidyanagar and a 30-year old woman from South Street in Eluru reportedly died. However, the doctors have not yet confirmed the cause of their death.

The condition of five patients, including a six-year-old girl, who was shifted to the Government General Hospital in Vijayawada, was stated to be stable. Consumption of contaminated water was suspected to be the reason behind the sudden hospitalisations, but officials clarified that they were awaiting the results of the water samples sent for analysis. COVID-19 tests were conducted on all the people admitted to the hospital, and they have tested negative. Blood and CSF (Cerebrospinal fluid) samples were collected and sent for testing. CT scans were also done. Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy visited Eluru on Monday, directing the health officials to make every effort to ensure the recovery of the people affected by the illness and find out the reason behind it at the earliest. Eluru Superintendent Mohan Rao said, "All the patients are being given emergency medical treatment, and 80 per cent of them are stable. They were admitted to the hospital after convulsions and mild headaches. In several cases, they fainted after vomiting. Some of them had bone dislocations and muscu-

lar pains. Epidemiology and Microbiology experts from Vijayawada went to Eluru to ascertain the cause of the illness. Services of psychiatrists and psychologists were also used to counsel the patients as several of them are distressed". Some of the discharged patients said they did not know what happened to them, and they were informed later that they had bouts of convulsions. Most of them said they consumed tap water as usual and started vomiting before fainting.

Assumptions:

Vomiting, headache, and seizures among patients in Eluru are not related to the sequence of symptoms of any known disease, say medical experts. There may be chances of encephalitis, but again the initial sequence of symptoms does not match as well. In some cases, the patients fainted first and then frothed.

Waterborne disease symptoms:

- Vomiting
- Stomachache
- Headache
- Seizure

The Actual Cause:

Eluru has a great water system having lakes which were inhabited by fishes. Due to floods and severe pollution in the lakes, the fishes suffered disease and their wastage in the lakes led to this illness. The lake water interfered with the drinking water, and the same water was used for agriculture where the crop and yield developed the organic elements in them. This has caused people to suffer from an unknown disease. Nickel has been found in the samples of blood, urine, and stool as well as from milk, rice, dal, vegetables, pesticides, soil, and water too.

Investigation:

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, found traces of lead

and nickel in blood samples of 25 victims from the 45 samples sent by the Government. Public health experts and scientists from various agencies are waiting for detailed reports of analysis of blood and water samples, but the primary suspicion is that of water contamination by heavy metals. Scientists suspect pesticide or insecticide to have seeped into drinking water sources.

The district administration and Eluru Municipal Corporation officials had also investigated this case and found that Eluru receives water through canals from both Godavari and Krishna rivers. The canals pass through agricultural fields where runoff laced with pesticides mixes with water in the canals. Many aspects of the mystery illness have baffled scientists. People who only use packaged drinking water have also fallen sick.

Who was involved in the investigation?

While AIIMS, New Delhi, has tested blood, water, and milk samples for heavy metals, the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) Hyderabad, is testing for pathogens. The National Institute for Nutrition, Hyderabad, had tested samples of urine, blood, water vegetables, fruits and other consumables for traces of heavy metals and pesticides. The Indian Institute of Chemical Technology is testing water and blood samples for traces of pesticides.

While lead and pesticides continue to be concentrated upon, forensic toxicologists and chemists were given significant preference for further investigations. Investigations pertaining to other pathogens and probable sources are also being carried out.

Conclusion:

Forensic toxicology is an essential component of various medical and legal investigations. The field covers numerous crimes involving

adulterations and poisons. It has played a good role in this case. Further development in the forensic field would help make a better society.

“THE EVIDENCE CANNOT BE INTIMIDATED. IT DOES NOT FORGET. IT SITS AND WAITS TO BE DETECTED, PRESERVED AND EVALUATED AND EXPLAINED”

References:

- <https://www.thehealthsite.com/news/eluru-like-mysterious-illness-emerges-in-andhra-pradeshs-pulla-village-791929/>

Myth - Anyone can enter the crime scene.

Fact - Only authorized people are allowed into a crime scene and their details are noted down along with their reason of entry, time of entry and time of exit in a book called the Crime Scene Log.