Preventing the spread of tuberculosis in India

Improving infection control in health facilities

Health facilities are places of healing and hope, yet they can also put patients and healthcare workers at risk. In crowded waiting areas of health centers in India, patients are not only vulnerable to the illnesses that are making them sick, but at risk of contracting the airborne diseases, like tuberculosis (TB), from patients around them.

India has one of the highest TB burdens in the world and protecting patients, health care workers, and communities from the spread of the infectious disease is crucial to bringing TB under control. Infection control plays a key role in preventing TB transmission.

STRENGTHENING HEALTH FACILITES

Recognizing the lack of updated infection control measures in some of the country's health facilities, India's Revised National TB Control Program (RNTCP) issued infection control guidelines in April 2010 to address this gap. With funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), PATH works with the RNTCP and the World Health Organization to help implement these guidelines.

THE CHOWDAWARAM COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER IN THE STATE OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Before PATH began collaborating with the center "most of the patient service areas were overcrowded and sputum collection [for TB

PATH/Gabe Bienczycki

testing] was done inside the building, which increases the risk of airborne infection," said the center administrator.

The consequences could be dire, as Dr. Satish Kaipilyawar, PATH's TB project director in India, explains: "when a symptomatic patient comes to the hospital, they are at high risk for contracting diseases from other patients. The rise of multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) compounds the problem. People who contract MDR-TB are automatically faced with a much longer, two-year treatment using stronger drugs that have severe side effects."

With technical support from PATH, the center's crowded registration unit was moved outside in the open air to allow for better ventilation, and temporary buildings were constructed to serve as registration and waiting areas for TB patients. Facility staff were trained in how to

make changes in administrative procedures, such as reducing crowding in waiting areas, screening and fast-tracking TB patients, conducting patient education, and collecting sputum samples in an open area. The center also instituted policies that stagger times high-risk patients come to the facility for services and ensure that well-ventilated seating areas are available.

The project has been so successful that the Andhra Pradesh state TB department has asked the center's administrator to help pilot the approach in additional sites throughout Andhra Pradesh. With funding from USAID, PATH is now providing support for similar infection control activities in more states, such as West Bengal and Gujarat.

PATH'S WORK IN INFECTION CONTROL GLOBALLY

Good infection control means working to improve environmental controls (such as upgrading labs and training staff), ensuring that people at risk have access to adequate personal protective equipment (including masks and respirators), and enforcing important administrative controls and policies to manage the health system in ways that reduce the risk of TB transmission.

With support from USAID, PATH is working across the spectrum of the health care system to strengthen infection control in high risk settings. Specifically, we have:

- Conducted risk assessments to ensure that local decision-makers are informed of potential infection control gaps and priorities.
- Developed infection control educational materials for health care workers to help them protect themselves and their patients.
- Convened experience-sharing workshops for national TB program staff and health care workers.
- In collaboration with Partners in Health, trained local engineers and architects so that existing facilities and laboratories can be improved and new ones can be planned with sound infection control in mind.

For more information

To learn more about PATH's TB work in India, please contact Dr. Satish Kaipilyawar at skaipilyawar@path.org or visit us online at www.path.org/tuberculosis.php.

To learn more about USAID's TB work, please contact Elizabeth Pleuss at epleuss@usaid.gov.

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About PATH

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