

Spotting tuberculosis from the frontlines: Engaging pharmacies in case-finding

“In 2011, I was invited to the training organized by PATH, which was on tuberculosis (TB) and TB/HIV,” shares Renalda Msanya, a drug seller from Kiomboi Kisiri Pharmacy in Buguruni, Tanzania. “One day, during my routine work, a woman came to buy a cough drug. She was carrying a child on her back...and coughing severely.” The woman pointed toward the drug shelf where the cough syrups were placed. But Renalda, having recently finished the PATH training, suspected that cough syrup wasn’t what the woman needed.

One of PATH’s strategies to find and treat TB patients is to build stronger referral networks through public, private, and informal health sector collaborations. These collaborations are important in finding patients who might otherwise be missed. With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), PATH has been training pharmacy staff—who are often the first to engage with treatment-seeking patients—to identify potential symptoms of TB and provide referrals for diagnosis and treatment.

Instead of handing cough syrup to the woman, Renalda asked, “What is your problem, madam?” The woman continued to cough and couldn’t talk, and her husband insisted that Renalda get the medicine. Concerned, Renalda stood firm. “I will help you,” she said, “but we need to talk. Come to this side and have a seat so that we can talk.”

Renalda asked the woman the five TB screening questions that she had learned in PATH’s training, then advised her to go to the hospital for diagnosis. Hospital tests showed that the woman did, in fact, have TB, and she was immediately put on treatment.

Still, Renalda’s work was not done. “The following week, the woman and her husband came back to thank me for my support,” she continues. “While we were talking, the baby, who had been sleeping on the back of her mother, started to cry. The mother took the baby from her back



Photo: PATH

and started to breastfeed him. However, I noticed that the baby was weak.”

Renalda again asked the screening questions and found that the baby had all the symptoms of TB. She referred the family back to the hospital, where the baby was also diagnosed with the contagious disease. Now mother and baby are on TB treatment and their health is improving. “The episodes of fevers are low and the child is now more active than before,” says Renalda. “I am happy that I managed to refer those two, especially the child.”

Along with more than 500 drug sellers and community members trained by PATH with USAID support, Renalda is playing a vital role in increasing TB case notification in Tanzania. In the first quarter of 2013, she referred 24 people for TB testing; of these, six were diagnosed with TB and are on their way to being cured.

For more information

To learn more about PATH's work in Tanzania, please contact Dr. Zahra Mkomwa at zmkomwa@path.org. To learn more about USAID's work in TB, please contact Elizabeth Pleuss at epleuss@usaid.gov.

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