



Tackling TB Through Pharmaceutical Systems Strengthening

Despite being both preventable and curable, tuberculosis (TB) is the second leading cause of death from an infectious disease worldwide. In 2011 alone, 1.4 million people worldwide died from TB. Due to its contagious nature and the fact that it affects the most economically productive age group (those between 15-50 years), TB creates a burden on both individuals and their communities. Successfully tackling the TB epidemic requires ensuring that individuals have access to affordable, quality treatment when and where they need it.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Systems for Improved Access to Pharmaceuticals and Services (SIAPS) Program advocates for the availability of quality TB pharmaceutical products and services by strengthening TB diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. To accomplish this goal, SIAPS collaborates with a wide variety of partners to address issues related to building the skillsets of TB providers, strengthening the supply chain for anti-TB medicines, and improving collaboration between public and private entities for improved health outcomes.

Building Sustainable Public-Private Mixes for TB Control

Many countries offer TB treatment free of charge in the public sector through the National Tuberculosis Program (NTP); however, for many individuals in developing countries the private sector is the first point of contact. By building partnerships between the public and private sectors and ensuring that the private sector is equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to provide diagnosis and quality-assured treatment, the burden of TB can be decreased.

In Tanzania, for example, SIAPS has partnered with the NTP to develop linkages between the private pharmaceutical sector and publically run TB diagnostic centers through a referral system for patients with TB-like symptoms. Following dispenser trainings on recognition of TB symptoms and introduction of referral materials, persons with presumptive TB are identified in pharmacies when they first seek care, and are then referred to a TB diagnostic center for testing and treatment.

e-TB Manager

The successful management of TB requires that NTPs collect, integrate, and process data from various sources and levels of the health system. One of the major challenges associated with this effort is that diverse medicines are required for different types of TB, such as drug sensitive (DS)-TB and drug resistant (DR)-TB, as well as different types of patients, such as children or individuals co-infected with HIV. To streamline the task of managing TB medicines and patients, SIAPS built upon the work of a predecessor program to create e-TB Manager, a customizable web-based tool that integrates all aspects of TB control. e-TB Manager synthesizes

information of persons with presumptive TB, patients, medicines, diagnosis and treatment outcomes into a single database for use by NTPs. The online tool allows for a holistic approach to TB management and avoids the common disconnect between treatment, inventory management, and outcomes reporting at various country levels.

Regional Meeting on Pharmaceutical Management for TB

In 2012, SIAPS hosted the 2nd Africa TB Regional Conference on Management of TB Medicines targeting specific challenges in TB medicines management at the country level. Representatives from NTPs, the World Health Organization (WHO), donors, and global TB partners worked in teams to identify the pressing challenges facing each country's management of TB medicines. By assessing the root causes of each barrier, teams were able to develop proposals for action, including identifying financial and technical resources needed to resolve their issues.

The meeting demonstrated that whatever challenge is identified in a country, there is likely an experience from elsewhere in the region that can offer insight or theoretical knowledge about how to approach a solution. Lines of communication opened up among the various countries, SIAPS and partners for improved and future collaboration to find solutions to TB medicines management related problems.

“By improving the monitoring of TB programs especially with the use of a new diagnostic tool, NTPs are able to discover and treat MDR-TB cases before patients pass on the infection to others.”



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