Project Title: Health-seeking behaviour of tuberculosis patients in Australia: a qualitative study

Host School/ Institute: Woolcock Institute of Medical Research

Address: Woolcock Institute of Medical Research
USYD Building K26, 431 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, NSW 2037


Personal Supervisor: Professor Guy Marks

Phone: 02 9114 0462

Email: guy.marks@sydney.edu.au

Co-Supervisor: Mr Paul H. Mason

Project Type: Survey, Qualitative Analysis, Clinical

Project Category: Public Health, Respiratory

Project Keywords:
1. Tuberculosis
2. health-seeking behaviour
3. treatment adherence
4. self-efficacy
5. social model

Project Description:
Despite the widespread availability of effective treatment, tuberculosis (TB) remains the second leading cause of death from infectious disease worldwide. The TB epidemic is fundamentally transnational in character, because TB is spread through social contact and infectious microorganisms easily cross national borders. With the bulk of the global TB burden and the majority of all estimated drug-resistant cases found in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia is in a unique position to provide international leadership by seizing the opportunity to become the first country to achieve TB elimination, the ambitious long-term target of the World Health Organisation STOP TB initiative. TB incidence rates in Australia are amongst the lowest in the world, but the number of new cases has not lowered in recent years. In the last decade, over a thousand cases of TB have been diagnosed each year, with each patient requiring a lengthy treatment of six months for drug-susceptible TB and up to five years for drug-resistant TB. The majority of cases occur among the overseas-born population. Barriers to case-detection can be due to communication issues, economic difficulties, fears of stigma, gender biases in health-seeking behaviour, and failure to identify the symptoms.

This project will draw upon patient interviews to learn more about these barriers. The aim is to develop tools to destigmatise TB and increase awareness about this treatable disease. With a focus on age, gender and socioeconomic factors, this qualitative study will investigate patterns of health-seeking behaviour, the obstacles to obtaining a correct diagnosis, and the challenges in completing treatment. Identifying the individual, social, and cultural factors that impede or facilitate early presentation of TB patients to doctors and their ongoing adherence to treatment will contribute to developing ways to reduce diagnostic delay, increase effective healthcare delivery, and stop the spread of TB disease.