Knowledge of Tuberculosis in secondary school students: A study in Mchinji district.

Chilunda MMA, Harries AD, Salaniponi FML

Introduction
Over the past five years the National Tuberculosis Control Programme has spent much effort in trying to educate the general public about tuberculosis (TB). This has been done by educational talks on the radio, posters, TB messages painted on buses and TB sponsored football matches. We were interested to see how much secondary school students knew about TB, and therefore carried out a questionnaire study in schools in Mchinji district.

Methods and results
Ten secondary schools in Mchinji district were visited, and students in forms 1-4 were asked to complete a questionnaire about TB in English. 6 questions demanded a yes/no response, and 4 were open-ended. 86 students (36 boys and 50 girls, whose age ranged from 12 to 20 years) completed the questionnaire, although not all the questions were answered by all the students.

84 (98%) students had heard about TB. 26 (31%) believed it was a bacterial disease, 18 (21%) a viral disease and 14 (16%) that it was a disease attacking the lungs without specifying an infectious aetiology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>Number of students (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>43 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>30 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>25 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>9 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>5 (6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some students answered two or more questions which is why the numbers do not add up to 86.

The Table shows where students had obtained information about TB. 61 (71%) students knew of someone who had suffered from TB, and this contributed to knowledge about the disease. 62 (72%) believed that TB could be associated with AIDS, and 20 (23%) believed that it was always associated with AIDS. 73 (85%) said that TB was curable, 78 (91%) said that it could be treated with modern drugs and 6 (7%) that it could be treated with traditional medicine. 47 (55%) students thought that TB was spread through aerosols or through spitting and 34 (40%) that it was transmitted through drinking unpasteurised milk or eating meat. 58 (67%) recognised that TB could be prevented by isolation of TB cases and 27 (31%) by avoiding overcrowding.

Discussion
This study carried out in a rural district of Malawi shows that most secondary school students know something about TB, and that the knowledge in general is reasonable. It is important in health education messages to get over the important points that TB in modern day Malawi is predominately spread by aerosols, that it is not always associated with AIDS and that modern drugs are the most effective ways of treating the disease. IEC (information, education and communication) specialists believe that the medium of radio is a better way of communicating messages to the general public than posters or leaflets, and indeed almost one third of students in this study had heard about TB through the radio.

Over two thirds of students knew of someone with TB, and perhaps more efforts should be made to encourage patients on TB treatment or those who have completed TB treatment to spread key messages about the disease to the community. TB patients on treatment in Ethiopia form “TB clubs” and contribute to the implementation of the district TB programme, while patients who have successfully completed treatment in Ethiopia and in Tanzania also contribute to improving the community’s knowledge and practice about TB.

Acknowledgements
We thank the Department for International Development (DFID), UK, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the Royal Dutch Tuberculosis Association (KNCV) for financial support for ongoing NTP-Prison clinical staff meetings. The study received the support of the TB Programme Steering Group and ethical approval from the Malawi Health Science Research Committee.

Chilunda MMA, Harries AD, Salaniponi FML
National Tuberculosis Control Programme, Community Health Science Unit, Private Bag 65, Lilongwe
Address for correspondence: Professor AD Harries, C/o British High Commission, PO Box 30042, Lilongwe 3
Email: adharries@malawi.net

References:

A.C. Opticals Ltd
OPHTHALMIC OPTICIANS
CONTACT LENS SPECIALISTS
Optical solutions on high quality standard.

A huge stock lens range and an own surfacing lab guarantee quick service. We also provide special contact lenses for Keratoconus patients.

Blantyre: Lilongwe
Development House Chief Kilipula House
Henderson Street Next to "ALI BABA"
Phone: 01 620 597 Phone: 01 756 161
Eyelets: Monday – Friday
01 756 161
1 & 3 Monday of the month