

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AT THE INTERFACE OF LABORATORY AND TB SERVICES

Ndlela Z¹, Loveday M², Sithebe H³

Background

South Africa has the seventh highest burden of TB in the world. Effective case finding is essential in controlling the TB epidemic. Problems between the laboratory support services and the health services were identified in a study undertaken in 2005 in a hospital in KwaZulu-Natal. This rapid appraisal aimed to identify if there was a leakage in smear positive suspects between identification at the laboratory and starting TB treatment at a health facility in Umlazi, eThekweni Metro.

Methods

Retrospective record reviews of laboratory and clinic TB registers

Results

Of the 348 patients diagnosed as smear positive in the laboratory register only 39% (136) were correctly recorded in the suspect and TB registers: Less than half (45% or 158) were recorded as smear positive; Twelve percent (42) were recorded as negative; Forty three percent (148) were not found. More than half of the patients (55% or 190) who were diagnosed as smear positive 'leaked' from the system as they were recorded as smear negative in the suspect register or they could not be found in the suspect or TB registers. Of the smears that were recorded as positive three +, 43% were recorded correctly in the suspect and TB registers, but 48% "leaked" from the system as they were either recorded as smear negative in the suspect register or could not be found in the suspect and TB registers.

Conclusions

Problems at the interface of the laboratory support system and the delivery of TB services are leading to a considerable leakage of patients between those that are diagnosed as smear positive and those that are started on TB treatment.

1. Health Systems Trust
2. MRC, formerly Health Systems Trust
3. TASC TB