A Successful Community Based Tuberculosis Control Program in Children in the Philippines

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Background

The Philippines has the ninth highest tuberculosis (TB) burden worldwide, with an estimated prevalence of 890/100,000 as of 2009. In 1999, the National Tuberculosis Programme (NTP) of the Department of Health (DOH) adopted the directly observed treatment short-course (DOTS) strategy for tuberculosis control among individuals older than 15 years of age. Recognizing the absence of guidelines for TB control in children <10 years of age, the DOH NTP convened a technical working group and drafted guidelines for the implementation of DOTS in children in 1999 and these were available in 2001. However, at that time, the guidelines were neither field-tested in the community nor adopted in a systematic manner.

The Philippine Ambulatory Pediatric Association (PAPA) developed a framework for strengthening of DOTS in children to assist in community preparation, conduct and monitoring in communities. Since 2001, PAPA has been involved in training of local health workers on detection, treatment and monitoring of patients, screening of patients using the DOTS in children guidelines, quality assurance of tuberculin skin test and reading, manner of implementation of directly-observed treatment, and treatment completion and monitoring.

Methods

PAPA piloted the program called “Community Rally for Childhood Tuberculosis” and assessed its implementation in three communities. This consisted of:

a. Collaboration with the Government Unit for establishing TB programs in children
b. Facilitation of a TB Rally for the whole Municipality
c. Community education through Storytelling and Poster-making Contest among the elementary and high school students

The project involved the following duties and responsibilities

1. The Philippine Department of Health/Local Government Units
   a. Provision of Health Center staff and BHWs for the TB Rally
   b. Resource speaker
   c. Support for TB rally
   d. Augmentation of medications/supplies
2. The Provincial Department of Health/Local Government Units
   a. Provision of Health Center staff and BHWs for the TB Rally
   b. Resource speaker
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3. Funding Agency (NGO)
   a. Support for TB rally
   b. Oversight and supervision

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The experience showed that through a well-developed framework whereby roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, cooperation of local health workers and stakeholders was possible for the successful piloting and implementation of guidelines for disease control and lay the ground for a successful public health programme addressing TB in the community which ensured sustainability beyond the scope of the project. Participatory community education strengthened the success of the project.

Results

A total of 156 health workers in Sta. Rosa, Floridablanca and Mabalacat were trained. 1923 children were screened in each of the respective communities.

Day 1 of the PAPA TB group doing tuberculin skin testing among the barangay (village) health workers of Municipality of Matnog, Province of Sorsogon, Philippines. The PAPA Tb Group facilitating the poster-making contest to assess the basic understanding of school children regarding tuberculosis in children, Province of Sorsogon, Philippines.

PAPA TB Group Lecture regarding tuberculosis in children, among the barangay (village) health workers of Municipality of Malina, Province of Surigao del Sur, Philippines.

Conclusions

The aim of this was to develop a framework for introduction and assess the feasibility of incorporating the guidelines on Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS) in children into existing National Tuberculosis Programme (NTP) DOTS for adults to assist in community preparation and standardized introduction into the communities.

Specific Objectives were

1. To increase awareness regarding control and prevention of childhood tuberculosis and to promote positive health practices through a community wide TB Rally
2. To encourage the participation of the various sectors who are stakeholders for the control of childhood tuberculosis
3. To strengthen the existing knowledge of the community and the schools regarding tuberculosis in children

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