

National Tuberculosis Curriculum Consortium Making Strides in TB Education

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Tuberculosis is still a health threat in some communities throughout the United States. In 2005, there were 14,093 new TB cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That same year the CDC confirmed the national TB case rate was 4.8 cases for every 100,000 people.

To enhance healthcare professionals' capabilities to prevent, detect, and treat TB, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) established the National Tuberculosis Curriculum Consortium (NTCC), which is based at the University of California San Diego (UCSD). The overarching goal of this 5-year, \$6.2 million dollar project (N01-HR-36157) is to improve knowledge of tuberculosis at health professions schools throughout the U.S.

"This is a controllable disease if health care workers can recognize the signs," says Antonino Catanzaro, M.D., UCSD Professor of Medicine and Principal Investigator for the NTCC. "By developing a tuberculosis curriculum that educates future health care providers, we are training health care workers to recognize the disease and start people on treatment before it becomes life threatening."

Now in its third year, the project has already achieved significant gains.

The consortium has organized its 35-plus members into eight discipline groups: medicine (MD/DO), undergraduate nursing (BSN), graduate nursing (NP/APN), respiratory therapy (RT), pharmacy (PharmD), physician assistants (PA), clinical laboratory sciences (CLS), and public health (MPH).

For each discipline, they have developed competencies and learning objectives. To date, these competencies have been accepted by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) for BSN and APN programs. The NTCC is working with several additional professional organizations in other disciplines for the same purpose. In addition, manuscripts describing different discipline-specific competencies have been submitted to various electronic and print journals for consideration.

"We believe by working with organizations that accredit universities and colleges we can impact curricular content about TB," said Shawn Harrity, M.D., M.S.Ed., Clinical Professor of Medicine at UCSD, who directs the consortium's Curriculum Development Unit.

The team has surveyed 1480 students in many of the NTCC schools to gauge their knowledge, attitudes, and confidence in caring for TB patients. Results of the survey indicate there is room for improvement. The overall findings and discipline-specific survey data are being prepared for publication in peer-reviewed journals and for presentations at national meetings. To date, the consortium members have made 15-20 presentations about the NTCC at professional meetings.

A number of educational products that use active-learning strategies have been developed and are available free at <http://ntcc.ucsd.edu>. Although the products are primarily directed to faculty who teach students, they are also appropriate for practicing professionals in lifelong learning programs (continuing education).

Finally, the NTCC is working with organizations that develop examinations for licensure or certification to include appropriate TB questions on their examinations.

The NTCC Core Group based at UCSD consists of Antonino Catanzaro, M.D. - Project Director; Marguerite Jackson, Ph.D., R.N. - Administrative Unit Director; Shawn Harrity, M.D., M.S.Ed. - Curriculum Development Unit Director; Helene Hoffman, Ph.D. - Educational Technology Unit Director; Jamie Hankins, B.S. - Instructional Developer; Daryl Cummings - Webmistress; and Laura Myhovich, B.A. - Project Assistant.

In addition to the Core Group, the NTCC consists of five curriculum centers and 17 partner schools nationwide. The five curriculum centers are the University of Southern California; Wayne State University; University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston; University of Arkansas, and Columbia University. Partner Schools were selected because of either a very high or very low incidence of tuberculosis cases in their geographic regions, as well as strong collegial involvement with Public Health Departments. Overall, the Consortium includes faculty members representing seven medical schools, seven nursing schools, and nine allied health schools.

More information about the NTCC can be obtained on its website (<http://ntcc.ucsd.edu>), or by calling 619-543-2098.