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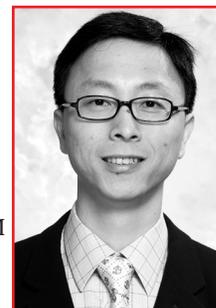
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Towards a Better Control of Tuberculosis

Dr. Pak-leung Ho

MRCP, FACP, MRCPATH, FRCPA, FHKCPATH, FHKAM
 Editor



Dr. Pak-leung Ho

This issue of the Medical Diary is dedicated to tuberculosis (TB). Despite our familiarity with this disease, TB continues to be a major public health issue. While the fight against TB has made major progress in recent years, big gaps remain in global tuberculosis case detection according to the WHO Global Tuberculosis Control Report 2005. While DOTS implementation is the cornerstone for proper tuberculosis control, basic DOTS implementation may not be enough to reach these targets. As discussed by Dr. CM Tam, the successful implementation of DOTS in Hong Kong has led to declining rates of resistance to first-line anti-TB drugs from 1986 to 1999 and high treatment successful rates of 80-85%. Despite these encouraging developments, our TB notification rates remain high at about 100 per 100,000 populations in the last decade. Ageing of the local population might have explained much of this stagnation. Population movements and frequent travel in and out of mainland China into Hong Kong SAR may be also contributory. Microbiology laboratories have important roles in the overall control of TB through provision of service for diagnosis and susceptibility testing. As conventional methods take many weeks to complete, the results may not be available to guide management of patients in a timely manner. Molecular tests are called for to address the prolonged turnaround time in different steps of the laboratory evaluations. Dr. WC Yam reviewed for us performance of the newer molecular tests and how these may be integrated into patient care. As TB remains to be an important disease in Hong Kong, we need to better equip ourselves by updating our knowledge in the management of TB. Three articles are dedicated for this purpose. Dr. WW Yew and Dr. CC Leung updated us on the management of pulmonary and extrapulmonary TB. Dr. KC Chang and Dr. CC Leung discussed a problem-based approach with practical recommendations on handling of patients with drug events from anti-TB medications. It is well-recognised that some patients with TB may deteriorate paradoxically despite appropriate treatment. Recent studies indicate that "paradoxical deterioration" occurs in 10-15% of patients during anti-TB therapy. This clinical entity, its presentation, pathogenesis, risk factors, diagnosis and management is reviewed in the article by Dr. Vincent CC Cheng.

Five years ago, the World Health Assembly resolved to achieve the global targets of detecting at least 70% of all estimated sputum smear-positive cases and to treat successfully at least 85% of them by 2005. In Hong Kong, the available estimates indicate that these two targets are largely met. Additionally, our TB death rates have decreased from 23/100,000 in 1990 to 7/100,000 populations in 2003. Looking into the future, it is however clear that more work would be necessary for us to meet up to the challenge of halving TB prevalence by 2015, as spelt out in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.