Workshop on THALI’s approach to engage with community structures

The KHPT and TB Alert India teams met for an intensive two-day workshop on October 25 and 26, to refine and finalize THALI’s approach to community structures. Through a participatory and collaborative process, the teams discussed the need to build on existing structures in the community and focus on integrating TB into the agendas and functioning of strong community institutions, including self-help groups, youth associations, slum associations and labour unions, in order to ensure that TB elimination efforts sustain after the project period. Patient support groups outside health facilities, at community level, will be formed and strengthened to ensure a platform for patients to voice their needs and experiences, to express their concerns and receive peer support, and facilitate the identification of patient advocates. The other community structures that THALI currently works with, including Key Opinion Leaders, Health Information Centres and Patient Advocates will be linked to existing community structures to ensure their sustainability.

Following the workshop, the team is formulating a set of strategies to engage with the most suitable community structures based on the principles of sustainability, community centrality, inclusiveness and context-specificity, and will then set a timeline and work plan to implement the finalized strategies.

Occupational sensitization in THALI expansion districts

The THALI staff arranged a large group meeting at Nallakunta in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, in the month of September to sensitize Self-help Groups (SHG) on TB and RNTCP services. A total of 70 SHG members participated from seven SHGs. A follow-up plan was made for referrals of community members from SHGs. CHWs in Andhra Pradesh also conducted sensitizations for about 70 casual labourers.

In Telangana, CHWs sensitized vulnerable occupational groups, including workers in limestone quarries, bidi workers and himalies (labourers), municipal sanitary workers, rice mill workers and garment industry workers, on basic information about TB, including symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and services available under the RNTCP. RANA helps identify patients in need and link them to support services.

Patient Support Group meetings ramp up across THALI districts

Patient Support Group meetings were conducted across THALI districts in three states, with the aim of providing patients a safe space to share their experiences with treatment and talk openly about issues such as stigma, isolation and barriers to treatment adherence. These meetings were held largely in health facilities on a monthly basis, where misconceptions about TB could be cleared by health officials. Patient Support Groups empower TB patients and their families to speak feel hopeful, motivate others in distress, and find support and solidarity on their road to recovery. In the September-October period, over 21 support group meeting were conducted across Karnataka, for over 300 patients and their families. In Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, about 139 patients support group meetings were organized, with the participation of 1500 people, including patients and their families, caregivers, RNTCP officials and project staff. THALI plans to formalize the patient support group structure in the upcoming quarter and develop a module on the same.

In Karnataka, CHWs sensitized vulnerable occupational groups, including workers in limestone quarries, bidi workers and himalies (labourers), municipal sanitary workers, rice mill workers and garment industry workers, on basic information about TB, including symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and services available under the RNTCP. RANA helps identify patients in need and link them to support services.

In Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, THALI staff facilitated the opening of bank accounts and Aadhaar enrolment, and linked patients to government schemes including Scheduled Caste Corporation loans and ICDS. Seven patients in the district were linked during the September-October period.

In Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, THALI staff facilitated nutrition support for three patients through a Mr. K. Bhaskar, a steel plant employee who came forward to support needy patients and expressed the wish to help more patients.

RANA helps identify patients in need and link them to support services.

In Bengaluru, the State TB Division deputed nine RNTCP staff, including TB Health Visitors and Supervisors, and link them to support services.

In Bengaluru, the State TB Division deputed nine RNTCP staff, including TB Health Visitors and Supervisors, and link them to support services.

Community engagement activities yield referrals in Hyderabad zone

THALI CHWs conducted 159 large group meetings over the two-month period, sensitizing 5194 key populations, including SHGs, VO (Village Organization) leaders and local community leaders. Nearly 48 presumptive TB cases were referred for testing and 3 of them were diagnosed with TB.

In September, school education programs were conducted in 44 schools in Hyderabad zone. Nearly 2100 students were sensitized on TB and 16 presumptive TB Cases were referred for testing.

Government Engagement

Training on TOG and PMDT for Medical Officers in Bengaluru

THALI organized a capacity-building initiative on Technical and Operational Guidelines (TOG), and guidelines on the Programmatic Management of Drug Resistant TB (PMDT) for Medical Officers in the public sector, in collaboration with the National Tuberculosis Institute (NTI), Bengaluru, and the District Tuberculosis Officers of Bengaluru Urban and Bengaluru Rural. THALI engaged resource persons from NTI and provided the training kits for the 40 participants who attended the training from September 4-6. The training employed the methodologies of case-based discussion and modular training, as well as a field visit to a DRTB centre and a demonstration of sputum collection and transport.

A discussion on practical difficulties and an interaction with DTOs regarding the current practices were the highlights of the training.

Capacity building on counselling for RNTCP staff in Telangana and Karnataka

THALI’s technical team conducted training of trainers (TOT) workshops to create a pool of state master trainers with the ability to provide counselling to TB patients. The first workshop in Hyderabad, from October 23-25, engaged 36 participants from 16 districts of Telangana, including Senior Treatment Supervisors (STSs), Senior TB Laboratory Supervisors, Key Opinion Leaders, for District Public-Private Mix and Advocacy, Communication and Social Mobilization Coordinators. The training involved case-based discussions and role play, based on the counselling training manual developed by the THALI team.

In Bengaluru, the State TB Division deputed nine RNTCP staff, including TB Health Visitors and STSs for a TOT on October 29-31.

A school education program at a Madrasa in Hyderabad

Enhancing the participants’ counselling skills through role play

The community structures workshop involved project staff at all levels

The community structures workshop involved project staff at all levels

A school education program at a Madrasa in Hyderabad

Enhancing the participants’ counselling skills through role play

The community structures workshop involved project staff at all levels

A school education program at a Madrasa in Hyderabad

Enhancing the participants’ counselling skills through role play

A school education program at a Madrasa in Hyderabad

Enhancing the participants’ counselling skills through role play
Building peer support through positive experiences shared at Patient Support Group meetings

in the ThALI expansion districts

Dr Rajaram S, Research Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, made an oral presentation of the study titled Knowledge about TB and Health Seeking Behaviour among Adult Chest Symptomatic (ICS) Population Living in Urban Slums of Hyderabad City at the 39th annual conference of the Indian Association for the Study of Population (IASP) held in Varanasi from September 18-20. The presentation included a brief introduction about ThALI, the purpose of the baseline, study design followed and the results. Health seeking behaviour was examined through two indicators: consulting a qualified health care provider after two weeks of cough and asking for a sputum test. Dr Rajaram highlighted the research finding that enhancing comprehensive knowledge on TB through messaging on key aspects of TB could improve the health seeking behaviour of urban slum communities in Hyderabad, and perhaps elsewhere.

Community-level campaigns in Bangalore

School brochure in Telugu and Kannada

Patient Information Brochure in English, Telugu and Kannada

Community handout on TB in English, Telugu, Kannada and Urdu


List of communications material developed

CHWs practice using the BCC materials through role play


Community handout on TB in English, Telugu, Kannada and Urdu (https://bit.ly/2Sg40UtB)

Patient Information Brochure in English, Telugu and Kannada (https://bit.ly/2KDkXq9)


Video

Community-level campaigns in Bangalore (https://bit.ly/2DSO0Qy)

In October, the ThALI communication team trained the CHWs in Karnataka on the usage of behaviour change communication (BCC) materials developed and finalized in the previous quarter. The CHWs were oriented on a set of materials on themes including TB testing, treatment adherence, nutrition and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, in the forms of flash cards and posters. Through a series of interactive activities, they were taught how to elicit responses from patients and caregivers, and motivate them to change their behaviour by linking their stories with the stories depicted in the material. 175 CHWs and District Program Coordinators were trained across the Bangalore, Mangalore, Dharwad and Koppal zones.

Each CHW will be issued a set of materials in early November, for use during their community engagement activities. The materials will also be uploaded to each CHW's tablet computer. The BCC materials training for CHWs in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh will commence in November.

In the previous quarter, the ThALI communication team trained the CHWs in Karnataka on the usage of behaviour change communication (BCC) materials developed and finalized in the previous quarter. The CHWs were oriented on a set of materials on themes including TB testing, treatment adherence, nutrition and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, in the forms of flash cards and posters. Through a series of interactive activities, they were taught how to elicit responses from patients and caregivers, and motivate them to change their behaviour by linking their stories with the stories depicted in the material. 175 CHWs and District Program Coordinators were trained across the Bangalore, Mangalore, Dharwad and Koppal zones.

Each CHW will be issued a set of materials in early November, for use during their community engagement activities. The materials will also be uploaded to each CHW's tablet computer. The BCC materials training for CHWs in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh will commence in November.

Building peer support through positive experiences shared at Patient Support Group meetings

Mehboob is an auto driver living in the Old City of Hyderabad. Years ago, his wife had contracted TB, and although she recovered fully, he remembers not fully understanding her condition, which compounded the stress of seeing her unwell. Recently, when his daughter was diagnosed with TB at her marital home in Belgaum, Karnataka, he brought her home to get her treated. The ThALI CHW reached out to the family, and gave them clear and correct information on TB, which helped Rehana and her family overcome their fears and understand that recovery was possible through a course of medicine. Parvene, the ThALI CHW working with the family, saw in the family an exemplary story of support, which could motivate other families to pull together, guide, and support patients through treatment. As Rehana’s condition improved, she attended support group meetings to share how her parents’ help with the care of her young child, and her husband’s visits from her marital home helped her feel cheerful and confident that she would get better, motivating her to take every single dose of medicine.

Discussions during patient support group meetings have revealed how women particularly bear the brunt of isolation and stigma from their families during treatment, causing them to abandon their hopes of getting better, and affecting treatment adherence. By bringing voices from patients like Rehana and her parents into support groups, CHWs work towards making patients and caregivers understand the importance of family support in keeping a patient on the road to recovery.

Earlier I was not taking any food or eggs or fruits, because I was feeling bad that I got TB. I was afraid of spreading it to my family members.

- Nazia, a TB patient from Koppal zone, Karnataka

“Through the monthly (patient support group) meetings I facilitate, more and more cases of TB are coming to my attention from the patients at the support group.”

- Nasreen Sultana, CHW, Hyderabad, Telangana

Voces from the field

“The frontline workers of the RNTCP are working hard with each patient for successful treatment completion. Now we need to get challenging patients to complete treatment as well.”

- Dr Anil, Deputy Director, State Tuberculosis Office, Karnataka

Mehboob and his family serve as an important example of treating TB as what it is, a curable disease, with no stigma attached.

For more information on the above activities, please contact Vrinda Manocha, Sr. Communications Officer at vrinda.manocha@khpt.org