States issue orders in support of the Differentiated Care Model
The State Tuberculosis Officers (STOs) of Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (AP) in February issued orders to District Tuberculosis Officers across the three states to support the rollout of the Differentiated Care Model (DCM) in THALI intervention areas. The STOs said that the DCM could add value to current TB control efforts and result in positive treatment outcomes among high-priority patients. THALI will train the RNTCP staff to all patients at the time of treatment initiation, with the initial support of the THALI community health workers (CHWs). The RNTCP will support the rollout of the DCM in six districts in Telangana, three districts in AP and 15 districts in Karnataka.

Capacity building creates ownership among community structures
The THALI team mapped 160 community structures in Bengaluru in order to identify organizations and associations interested in supporting TB prevention and control activities in their communities. Community coordinators made a shortlist of community structures for capacity building. Ten community structures were oriented in the January-February period on TB, the symptoms, diagnosis and facilities available to patients, as well as structures’ potential role in patient care and support efforts. The organizations involved included one youth group, two community-based organizations and seven SHGs. Out of the six structures trained in January, three have begun referring patients. Two of these- an SHG and the youth group - have begun operating HICs within their premises.

Sustainability Initiatives

Health Information Centres expand across states
In Varanagul district of Telangana, TB Alert India worked intensively on integrating Health Information Centres (HICs) into community structures. A notable achievement was the establishment of an HIC in a construction workers’ union office, inaugurated by the District TB Control Officer, Dr S.S. Mallikarjun. Among the 33 HICs established by community structures in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, another important example is the one set up by a Self-help Group (SHG) called Rudraveena Mahila Association in Hyderabad. The local police force participated in this inauguration along with health personnel and 45 members of the SHG.

In Karnataka, in the districts of Vijayapura and Bagalkot, 28 HICs were established in shops, public libraries and restaurants. 20 patients were referred for testing from the HICs, all of them were tested, yielding six positive cases. In Belgam, 14 HICs were established during the period, from which 28 cases were referred, and 14 tested, yielding no positive cases.

Government Engagement

Sensitization of government stakeholders to promote collaborative efforts
A meeting between RNTCP and THALI staff was held on January 23 in Bengaluru to discuss the ways in which CHWs and their counterparts from the state program could work better together. The DTO of BBMP participated in the meeting, along with frontline workers from both KHPT and the RNTCP. The roles of the CHWs were clarified and there was an emphasis on the need for establishing a better rapport and working as one state entity, rather than different agencies, to better coordinate the TB program.

The THALI staff in Bengaluru also organized a meeting in partnership with the DTO, BBMP, on February 21, in order to sensitize the former Mayor of Bengaluru and influential sitting councillor Mr Katte Satyanarayana on TB, and enlist his support in providing nutrition for the TB patients of his ward. Mr Satyanarayana assured THALI of his support in raising funds from his network of council members. Sensitization programs were organized in Saundati, Gokak and Bailongal town of Belagavi district, in which more than 26 members of the Town Municipal Councils participated. The program included presentations on the TB scenario in the town and district and the services available under the RNTCP. The role of elected members in assisting the TB patients was also discussed. Similar programs was organized in Badami and Basavanagudi town in Vijayapura in which more than 30 members participated.

THALI leverages funds from NGO-PPP scheme
THALI leveraged funds from a government-public-private partnership (PPP) scheme for the recruitment of lab technicians for two high-load CBNAAT facilities in Bengaluru. KHPT signed an MoU to receive funds to pay the salaries of four lab technicians under a PPP scheme with the District TB Office, Bengaluru Urban.
Supportive supervision visits to monitor the DCM approach

The THALI technical team conducted supervision visits to the districts of Bijapur, Raichur, Gulbarga, Hyderabad and Warrangal in February in order to ensure that the CHWs maintained quality and standardized approaches to patient care and support through the DCM. They met with priority patients to understand how the CHWs were interacting with them, checked for consistency and completeness in the CHWs’ records and observed the discussions of patient support group meetings. The team members also liaised with Medical Officers in Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and requested them to meet with TB patients visiting the PHC and provide them support.

Enlisting livelihood and nutrition support from the community

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Communications

TB Alert India used the ‘Republic Ride’, a prominent cycling event organized by public ride-sharing company Cykul, as a platform for TB awareness in Hyderabad’s Gachibowli stadium. The team set up a stall at the ‘Seva Mela’, an exhibition for NGOs to showcase their work, and educated a community of amateur and professional cyclists on TB through interpersonal contact and the distribution of IEC materials.

Harnessing the community’s potential to support TB patients

Akshita’s father worked hard as an electrician in Hyderabad to provide a good life to his wife and three daughters, but he struggled with adhering to his TB medication, and passed the infection onto Akshita and her sister. Struggling to cope with the needs of three patients, the family could no longer afford 15-year-old Akshita’s school fees. Despite having TB, she was determined to give her exams, but the school would not let her attend until the fees were paid. The THALI community health worker (CHW) realized the situation and the needs of the family.

USAID visits THALI project sites in northern districts of Karnataka

Mr Xerses Sidhwa, Dr Amar Shah and Kachina Chawla from USAID visited THALI expansion districts in the north Karnataka districts of Bagalkot, Vijayapura, Bellary and Koppal from February 15-16. The team reviewed the implementation of THALI project innovations and activities including HIC, the DCM and Patient Support Groups, discussed the planned pilot of technological innovations with the THALI team, and met with public health officials in each district to understand the specific needs for a TB-HIV intervention in the region. The team recommended that THALI develop innovation models in a few areas, which can be scaled up at the state and national level. THALI also plans to measure and generate evidence on the efficacy of initiatives like community engagement, RANA

Program Review

USAID visits THALI project sites in northern districts of Karnataka

The USAID team meets with patients at a support group meeting in Hospet

RANA mobile application developed

The MERL team released and alpha version of a mobile application to assist CHWs to carry out Risk and Needs Assessments (RANA) through a tablet. The application will allow for the collection of real-time data, which will help the field staff quickly identify high-risk groups for outreach and follow-up. The alpha version of the app was tested by the THALI team and feedback was given to the developers, with the goal of finalizing it in March. The team plans to integrate the RANA mobile application into the RNTCP’s arsenal of data collection tools.

Google map navigation feature rolled out for CHWs

THALI's Prevention, Care and Support (PCS) software was updated with a Google map navigation feature, which will allow the CHWs to mark a patient’s location on the map, generate a list of patients within a two-kilometre radius of their location and find their way to their houses with directions, making it easier for them to quickly and efficiently conduct their support activities.

Community Initiatives

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL)

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Voices from the field

“"Our problems are discussed, we talk to each other about our problems. More than anything, we come together. That’s a big relief.”

- A patient talking about patient support groups in Vijayapura district, Karnataka

"The Differentiated Care Model as an innovation sounds good to us as it may result in better treatment outcomes among high-priority patients.”

- Dr Rajesham, State TB Officer, Telangana