Review of Contemporary Philosophy
ISSN: 1841-5261, e-ISSN: 2471-089X
Vol 22 (1), 2023
Pp 4684 - 4707

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Improving Tuberculosis Screening and Treatment Completion Rates Among Marginalized Groups

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Abstract

Background: Tuberculosis (TB) remains a significant global health challenge, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations. Social determinants such as poverty, stigma, limited access to healthcare, and systemic inequities hinder timely screening and treatment completion, exacerbating health disparities. Traditional healthcare approaches have struggled to address these multifaceted barriers effectively, necessitating a comprehensive, interdisciplinary response that integrates nursing, pharmacy, and public health strategies.

Aim: This paper aims to evaluate the role of an interdisciplinary approach in improving TB screening and treatment completion rates among marginalized groups. By leveraging the combined expertise of nursing, pharmacy, and public health, this study seeks to identify effective strategies that mitigate barriers and enhance TB care outcomes.

Methods: A literature review of peer-reviewed studies, global health reports, and case studies was conducted to examine the impact of interdisciplinary models on TB care. Key areas of focus included community nursing interventions, pharmacological adherence strategies, and public health policies targeting marginalized populations. The review also explored frameworks for integrating these disciplines into collaborative care models.

Results: Interdisciplinary approaches demonstrated improved TB screening uptake and treatment adherence among marginalized groups. Nursing interventions enhanced patient engagement through culturally sensitive education and follow-ups. Pharmacy services improved medication accessibility and adherence support, while public health strategies addressed structural barriers through community outreach and policy reforms. Successful programs emphasized the importance of collaboration and community-centered care.

Conclusion: An interdisciplinary approach offers a promising pathway to reduce TB disparities among marginalized populations. The integration of nursing, pharmacy, and public health not only addresses

systemic barriers but also promotes equitable healthcare delivery. Scaling such models can advance TB care and serve as a blueprint for tackling other complex health disparities.

Keywords: Tuberculosis, marginalized populations, interdisciplinary approach, nursing, pharmacy, public health, treatment adherence, health equity.

Received: 07 October 2023 **Revised:** 22 November 2023 **Accepted:** 06 December 2023

Introduction

Tuberculosis (TB) remains one of the most pervasive public health challenges, particularly in marginalized populations where social, economic, and structural inequities intersect to exacerbate health disparities. Despite significant global efforts to control and eliminate TB, the disease continues to disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including individuals experiencing homelessness, immigrants, and those living in poverty-stricken regions [1], [2]. The inequitable distribution of TB burden is not merely a consequence of biological susceptibility but a manifestation of underlying societal and systemic inequities, including limited access to healthcare services, stigmatization, and the absence of culturally competent interventions [3]. Addressing these disparities requires a multifaceted, interdisciplinary approach that integrates the expertise of nursing, pharmacy, and public health to enhance TB screening and treatment completion rates.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that TB incidence rates are declining at a rate of 2% per year globally; however, this progress is insufficient to meet the targets outlined in the End TB Strategy, which aims for a 90% reduction in TB incidence by 2035 [4]. Marginalized populations face unique barriers that hinder their ability to access early screening and complete treatment, including logistical challenges such as transportation, language barriers, and systemic discrimination within healthcare systems [5]. Furthermore, suboptimal patient education about the disease and the adverse effects of long-term pharmacological treatment often contribute to non-compliance with treatment regimens [6]. These barriers necessitate innovative solutions that transcend traditional healthcare delivery methods and actively address the social determinants of health influencing TB outcomes.

One critical challenge in combating TB in marginalized populations is the fragmented nature of healthcare delivery, which often fails to address the complex interplay of social and medical factors. Traditional models of TB care have typically relied on siloed approaches, with limited coordination between healthcare disciplines such as nursing, pharmacy, and public health [7]. This lack of integration results in missed opportunities for comprehensive care, particularly in communities where health literacy is low and access to services is constrained. In response to this gap, an interdisciplinary approach that combines the strengths of nursing, pharmacy, and public health offers a promising framework for improving TB care outcomes. Such an approach leverages the patient-centered focus of nursing, the pharmacological expertise of pharmacy, and the population-level strategies of public health to create a holistic model of care tailored to the needs of marginalized populations [8].

Nursing plays a pivotal role in addressing TB-related disparities by providing culturally sensitive care, fostering patient trust, and offering tailored health education [9]. Community health nurses, in particular, are uniquely positioned to identify individuals at risk of TB within marginalized communities and facilitate early screening and diagnosis. Moreover, they act as patient advocates, ensuring that care plans are culturally appropriate and that patients receive consistent follow-up to support treatment adherence [10]. Nurses' ability to build rapport with patients is especially critical in marginalized populations, where mistrust in healthcare systems often deters individuals from seeking care [11]. Pharmacy, on the other hand, contributes to TB care by ensuring medication access and adherence through innovative delivery mechanisms and counseling services. Pharmacists play a central role in implementing directly observed therapy (DOT), a strategy recommended by the WHO for improving treatment adherence [12]. By addressing challenges such as drug side effects and drug-drug interactions, pharmacists enhance the likelihood of treatment completion, thereby reducing the risk of drug resistance and relapse [13]. Community pharmacies, which often serve as the first point of contact for marginalized populations, provide an accessible and trusted avenue for delivering TB-related health services [14].

Public health, as a discipline, complements nursing and pharmacy by addressing the broader determinants of TB outcomes. Public health professionals design and implement community-based interventions, advocate for policy changes, and conduct surveillance to identify and respond to emerging trends in TB incidence [15]. Interventions such as mobile clinics, peer-led education programs, and subsidies for transportation and treatment have proven effective in increasing screening uptake and reducing treatment default rates in underserved communities [16].

Furthermore, public health campaigns play a critical role in destigmatizing TB and promoting health-seeking behaviors among marginalized populations [17]. Despite the potential of an interdisciplinary approach, several challenges must be addressed to operationalize this model effectively. These include barriers to communication and collaboration among healthcare professionals, resource constraints, and the need for specialized training to equip providers with the skills necessary for interdisciplinary practice [18]. The integration of electronic health records (EHRs) and telehealth platforms offers promising solutions to enhance coordination and streamline care delivery in resource-limited settings [19]. Additionally, the involvement of community leaders and organizations is essential for ensuring that interventions are culturally resonant and sustainable over the long term [20].

This paper explores the potential of an interdisciplinary approach to improve TB screening and treatment completion rates among marginalized populations. By examining the roles of nursing, pharmacy, and public health in addressing barriers to care, this study highlights the value of collaboration in tackling one of the most persistent global health challenges. The findings aim to inform healthcare policy and practice, providing actionable insights for the design and implementation of equitable and effective TB care models.

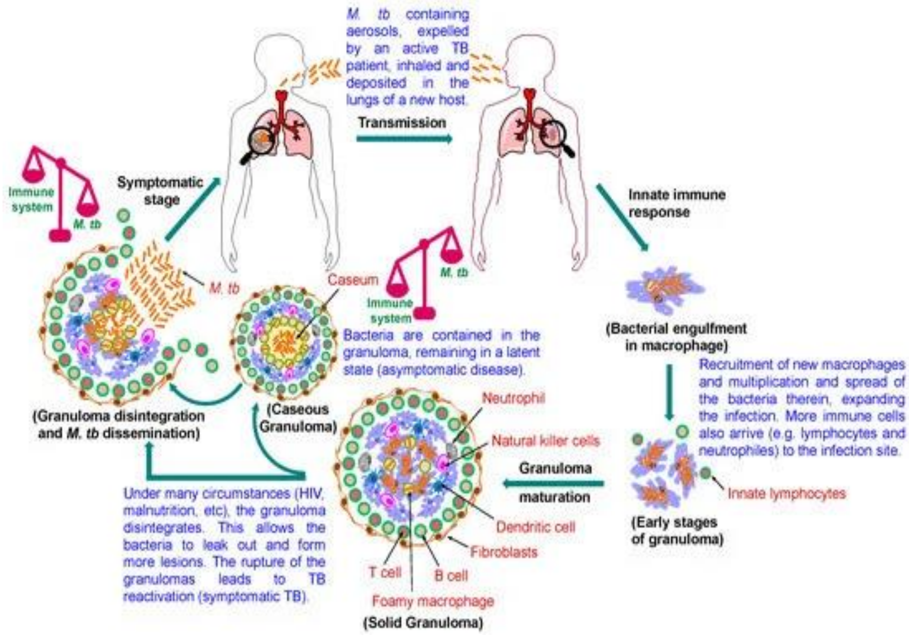

Figure 1: Pathophysiology of pulmonary TB.

The Burden of Tuberculosis Among Marginalized Groups

Tuberculosis (TB) remains one of the most critical public health challenges globally, causing significant morbidity and mortality, particularly in marginalized populations. Despite advancements in diagnostic tools, treatment regimens, and global awareness campaigns, TB continues to disproportionately impact those living in poverty, migrants, homeless individuals, and indigenous communities [21]. Marginalized groups face a combination of biological, social, and structural vulnerabilities that exacerbate their risk of contracting TB and hinder their ability to access timely and adequate healthcare services [22]. These barriers, compounded by systemic inequities, demand a nuanced understanding of the TB burden in these populations to inform targeted interventions.

Epidemiology of TB in Marginalized Populations

Globally, an estimated 10.6 million individuals developed TB in 2021, with over 1.6 million TB-related deaths, marking a resurgence of cases due to the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption of healthcare services [23]. Marginalized populations bear a disproportionate share of this burden. For instance, in high-burden regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, poverty, malnutrition, and overcrowded living conditions facilitate the transmission of Mycobacterium tuberculosis [24]. In high-income countries, TB rates are concentrated among migrants and asylum seekers, reflecting disparities in healthcare access and pre-existing vulnerabilities [25]. Indigenous populations, particularly in regions like North America and Australia, also experience elevated TB incidence rates due to historical injustices, including displacement and inadequate access to healthcare infrastructure [26].

In urban settings, individuals experiencing homelessness face TB incidence rates up to 20 times higher than the general population [27]. This elevated risk stems from a combination of factors, including limited access to healthcare, substance use disorders, and poor living conditions in shelters that facilitate TB transmission. Incarcerated populations also represent a significant subgroup at risk for TB. Prisons often have overcrowded and poorly ventilated conditions, fostering rapid transmission among inmates. A study conducted in Brazil found that TB incidence rates in prisons were 30 times higher than in the general population, underscoring the need for targeted public health interventions in correctional facilities [28].

Social Determinants of Health and TB Vulnerability

The social determinants of health significantly influence TB risk and outcomes among marginalized groups. Poverty is perhaps the most critical determinant, as it is closely linked to malnutrition, overcrowded living conditions, and limited access to healthcare [29]. Malnutrition, in particular, weakens immune defenses, increasing susceptibility to latent TB infection progressing to active disease. A recent meta-analysis found that individuals with severe malnutrition had a threefold higher risk of developing active TB compared to well-nourished counterparts [30].

Stigma and discrimination further exacerbate the burden of TB in marginalized populations. Many individuals in these groups face dual stigmatization due to TB and their marginalized status, such as homelessness or immigration. This stigma discourages affected individuals from seeking care or adhering to treatment regimens, resulting in delayed diagnoses and worse outcomes [31]. Women in marginalized communities, for example, often experience greater delays in accessing TB care due to cultural norms, caregiving responsibilities, and limited autonomy [32]. Addressing the role of stigma is crucial to reducing TB burden and improving care engagement.

Structural Barriers to TB Care

Access to healthcare services is a persistent challenge for marginalized groups. Geographic, financial, and systemic barriers often prevent these populations from seeking timely diagnosis and treatment. A study in India, a high TB-burden country, found that over 40% of patients faced significant delays in accessing diagnostic services due to transportation costs and long distances to health facilities [33]. Similarly, undocumented migrants in high-income countries frequently avoid seeking TB care due to fear of deportation or discrimination [34]. These barriers lead to poorer outcomes and higher rates of TB transmission within these communities.

Another critical structural barrier is the lack of culturally competent care. Health systems often fail to account for linguistic, cultural, and social differences, leaving marginalized populations underserved [35]. Indigenous populations in Canada, for instance, report a mistrust of healthcare systems due to historical injustices, leading to delayed diagnoses and higher TB mortality rates compared to the non-indigenous population [36]. Training healthcare providers in cultural competence and establishing community-driven health initiatives can help address these gaps.

The Impact of Co-morbidities on TB Burden

Co-morbidities such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes, and substance use disorders compound the burden of TB in marginalized populations. HIV remains one of the most significant risk factors for TB, as it weakens the immune system, facilitating the progression of latent TB infection to active disease. Sub-Saharan Africa, which bears the highest burden of HIV, also accounts for the majority of HIV-associated TB cases globally [37]. Integrated care models that address both TB and HIV are essential to improving outcomes in these populations.

Diabetes is another growing concern, particularly in low- and middle-income countries undergoing rapid urbanization. Diabetes triples the risk of developing active TB and complicates treatment outcomes [38]. In marginalized groups with limited access to chronic disease management, the co-occurrence of diabetes and TB poses significant public health challenges. Substance use disorders, including alcohol and intravenous drug use, also contribute to TB vulnerability by impairing immune function and reducing treatment adherence [39].

Policy Gaps and Programmatic Challenges

Despite global commitments to ending TB, significant policy gaps remain in addressing the unique needs of marginalized populations. Many national TB programs lack the resources or frameworks to implement targeted interventions for high-risk groups [40]. For example, the WHO End TB Strategy emphasizes universal health coverage, but in practice, many marginalized populations are excluded due to systemic inequities and resource constraints [41].

Funding limitations further hinder TB control efforts. High-burden countries often depend on external donor funding, which is insufficient to meet the complex needs of marginalized populations [42]. Additionally, TB research remains underfunded compared to other infectious diseases, limiting the development of novel diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines tailored to the needs of these communities [43].

Innovations in Addressing TB Burden

Several innovative approaches have emerged to address the TB burden in marginalized populations. Mobile health (mHealth) technologies, such as smartphone applications and SMS reminders, have been used to improve treatment adherence and facilitate communication between patients and healthcare providers [44]. Community-based care models, which empower local leaders and organizations to deliver TB services, have also shown promise in increasing screening uptake and reducing treatment delays [45]. For example, a program in Kenya that trained community health workers to deliver TB education and treatment support significantly improved outcomes among rural and marginalized populations [46].

Another promising innovation is the use of digital adherence technologies (DATs), such as electronic pillboxes and video-observed therapy, to monitor treatment adherence remotely [47]. These technologies offer an alternative to traditional directly observed therapy (DOT), reducing the burden on patients and healthcare systems while maintaining high adherence rates.

Future Directions

Addressing the TB burden in marginalized populations requires a holistic approach that integrates medical, social, and structural interventions. Strengthening health systems to provide equitable access to care, investing in culturally competent healthcare delivery, and addressing the social determinants of health are critical to achieving this goal. Additionally, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among nursing, pharmacy, and public health professionals can enhance the effectiveness of TB interventions [48].

Scaling up funding for TB research and integrating novel technologies into TB programs are also essential to advancing care for marginalized populations. Policymakers must prioritize these efforts to ensure that global TB control strategies leave no one behind.

Challenges in TB Screening and Treatment

Tuberculosis (TB) remains a significant global health challenge, with 10.6 million new cases and 1.6 million deaths reported in 2021 alone [49]. Despite being a preventable and curable disease, TB screening and treatment continue to face numerous obstacles, particularly among marginalized populations. These challenges are rooted in social determinants, structural barriers, resource constraints, and gaps in healthcare systems. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the barriers to screening and treatment as well as the implementation of innovative solutions tailored to high-burden settings.

Barriers to TB Screening

1. Limited Access to Diagnostic Facilities

One of the most significant challenges in TB screening is the limited availability of diagnostic facilities, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where the burden of TB is highest. Access to diagnostic tools such as Xpert MTB/RIF, a molecular diagnostic test recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), remains inadequate in many regions due to high costs and infrastructure requirements [50]. Additionally, rural and remote areas often lack laboratories equipped for sputum microscopy, further delaying diagnosis [51].

For example, a study in sub-Saharan Africa found that over 40% of patients experienced delays exceeding two weeks between the onset of symptoms and diagnosis due to the unavailability of diagnostic services in their vicinity [52]. These delays not only worsen patient outcomes but also increase the likelihood of disease transmission.

2. Stigma and Misinformation

Stigma associated with TB is another major barrier to screening. In many cultures, TB is perceived as a "shameful" disease linked to poverty or immorality, discouraging individuals from seeking timely diagnosis [53]. Misinformation about TB transmission and fear of social exclusion further deter individuals from participating in screening programs [54]. Women in patriarchal societies, in particular, face significant barriers in accessing TB diagnostic services due to stigma and gender-based discrimination [55].

3. Weak Referral Systems

Weak or non-existent referral systems between primary healthcare centers and specialized TB facilities contribute to inefficiencies in the screening process. Patients often have to navigate complex healthcare pathways without adequate guidance, leading to diagnostic delays and missed cases [56]. A recent study in India highlighted that over 30% of presumptive TB cases referred from primary health centers failed to reach diagnostic facilities due to logistical challenges and out-of-pocket expenses [57].

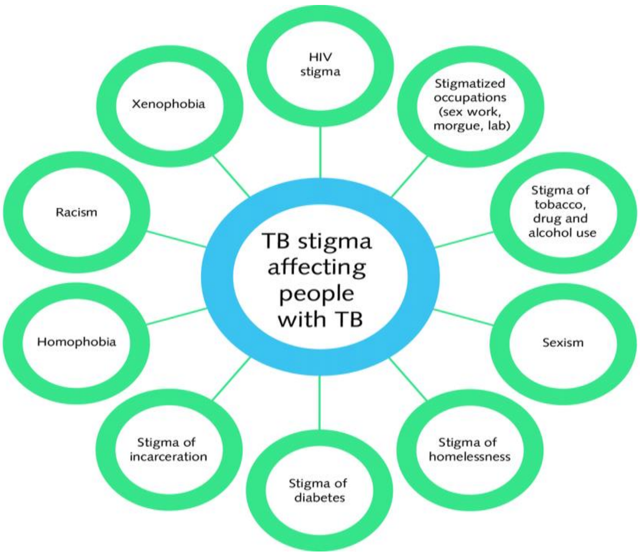

Figure 2: Stigmas that may impact people with TB

Barriers to TB Treatment

1. Treatment Non-Adherence

Treatment non-adherence is a critical challenge in managing TB. Standard TB treatment requires patients to complete a six-month regimen of multiple drugs, which can be physically and psychologically demanding [58]. Side effects such as nausea, hepatotoxicity, and neuropathy frequently lead to treatment discontinuation, particularly in resource-constrained settings where patients lack access to supportive care [59].

Moreover, socio-economic challenges such as loss of income due to illness exacerbate non-adherence. Patients who are unable to afford transportation to healthcare facilities or who prioritize daily survival over treatment are more likely to abandon their regimens [60]. Non-adherence not only compromises patient outcomes but also increases the risk of drug-resistant TB, which is more challenging and costly to treat [61].

2. Drug-Resistant TB

The emergence of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) and extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB) poses significant challenges to treatment. MDR-TB requires prolonged treatment with second-line drugs, which are often less effective, more expensive, and associated with severe side effects [62]. Recent estimates suggest that only 60% of MDR-TB cases achieve successful treatment outcomes globally [63]. The management of drug-resistant TB is further complicated by the limited availability of second-line drugs in LMICs and the lack of trained healthcare providers to administer these regimens [64].

3. Social Determinants of Health

The social determinants of health, including poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate housing, significantly influence treatment outcomes. Malnutrition, for example, weakens the immune system, reducing patients' ability to respond to treatment [65]. Similarly, overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions increase the risk of reinfection and transmission within households [66]. Addressing these social determinants is crucial for improving treatment adherence and overall TB outcomes.

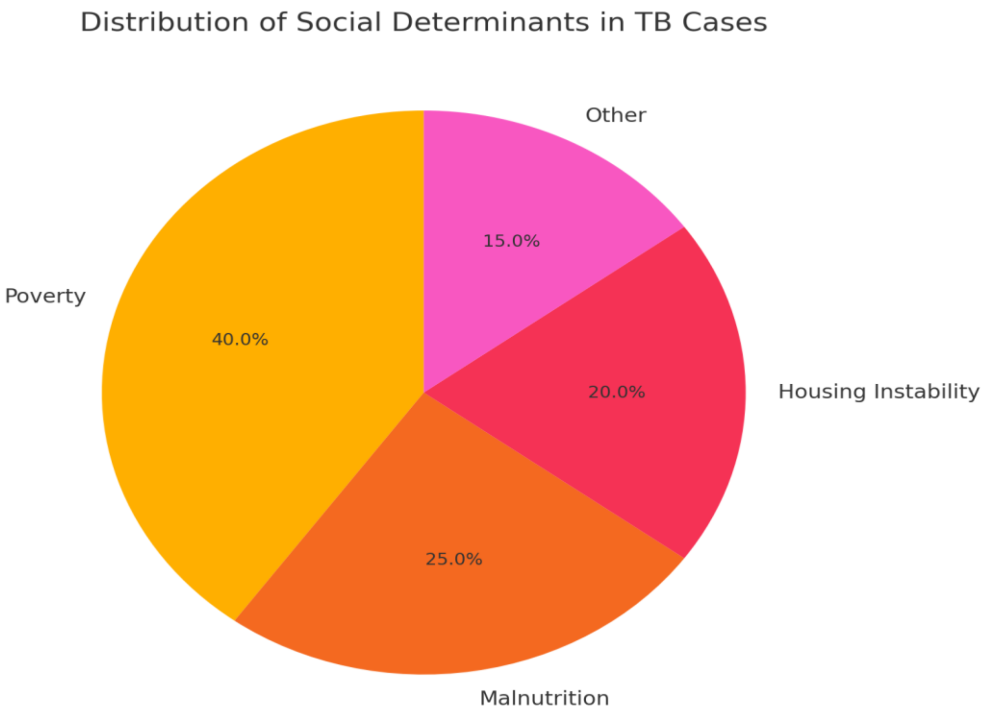

Figure 3: Distribution of Social Determinants in TB Cases

4. Weak Health Systems

Weak healthcare systems in many high-burden countries exacerbate challenges in TB treatment. Chronic underfunding, insufficient workforce capacity, and fragmented service delivery models hinder the effective management of TB programs [67]. In many settings, TB care is overly centralized, forcing patients in rural areas to travel long distances to access treatment. Decentralizing TB services to primary healthcare facilities could significantly improve accessibility and continuity of care [68].

Structural and Systemic Challenges

1. Funding Gaps

Global efforts to control TB are constrained by significant funding gaps. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria reported that the funding available for TB programs in 2022 was $3 billion short of the $13 billion required annually to achieve global targets [69]. These gaps are particularly pronounced in LMICs, which rely heavily on external donor funding to sustain their TB programs. The COVID-19 pandemic has further strained resources, diverting attention and funding away from TB control [70].

2. Integration of TB and Other Health Services

The lack of integration between TB services and other healthcare programs, such as those for HIV, diabetes, and maternal health, limits opportunities for comprehensive care. TB-HIV co-infection, for instance, is a significant public health issue, yet many healthcare systems continue to treat the two diseases in isolation [71]. Integrating TB and HIV services, as recommended by WHO, has shown to improve patient outcomes and reduce healthcare costs [72]. However, achieving this integration requires significant investment in infrastructure, training, and policy reform [73].

Innovations to Overcome Screening and Treatment Challenges

1. Digital Health Technologies

Digital health technologies are increasingly being used to address barriers in TB screening and treatment. Mobile health (mHealth) applications, for instance, have been deployed to provide patients with medication reminders, health education, and virtual consultations [74]. Video-observed therapy (VOT), which allows healthcare providers to monitor treatment adherence remotely, has shown promise in improving adherence rates and reducing the burden on healthcare facilities [75].

2. Community-Based Interventions

Community-based approaches have proven effective in overcoming many challenges associated with TB care. Community health workers (CHWs) play a critical role in identifying presumptive TB cases, facilitating access to diagnostic services, and supporting patients throughout their treatment journey [76]. In Malawi, a community-based program that trained CHWs to deliver TB care resulted in a 20% increase in treatment completion rates [77].

3. Advances in Diagnostics

Recent advancements in TB diagnostics are addressing some of the limitations of traditional tools. For example, the introduction of the Truenat MTB test, a portable molecular diagnostic tool, has improved access to rapid and accurate TB diagnosis in resource-limited settings [78]. Similarly, urine-based tests for TB in HIV-positive individuals have simplified the diagnostic process and reduced delays [79].

The challenges in TB screening and treatment are multifaceted, encompassing social, economic, and structural barriers. Marginalized populations are disproportionately affected by these challenges, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and systemic reforms. Innovations such as digital health technologies, community-based care models, and advances in diagnostics offer promising solutions to improve TB outcomes. However, sustained investment in healthcare infrastructure, workforce development, and policy integration is essential to overcome these barriers and achieve global TB control targets.

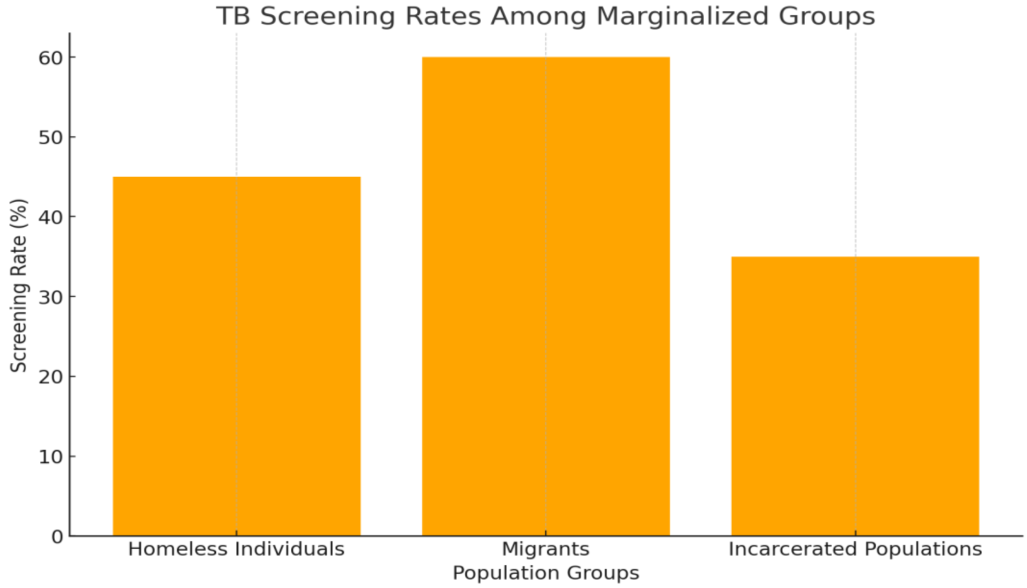

Figure 4: TB Screening Rates Among Marginalized Groups

Nursing Contributions to TB Care

Nursing plays a pivotal role in tuberculosis (TB) care, particularly in addressing the multifaceted challenges of TB screening, treatment, and patient engagement. Nurses are at the forefront of healthcare delivery in diverse settings, often serving as the first point of contact for patients in high-burden areas. They bridge the gap between patients and healthcare systems by offering culturally competent care, facilitating early diagnosis, enhancing treatment adherence, and addressing social determinants of health. This section examines the critical contributions of nursing to TB care, focusing on their roles in prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and the implementation of innovative community-based interventions.

Nurses as Frontline Care Providers in TB Management

Early Detection and Diagnosis

Nurses play a vital role in the early detection of TB cases, particularly in high-burden communities where access to healthcare is limited. Through community outreach programs and primary healthcare settings, nurses conduct symptom screenings, educate patients about TB, and facilitate timely referrals for diagnostic testing [80]. They also collect sputum samples and perform other diagnostic procedures, contributing to early case identification. A study in South Africa highlighted that nurse-led screening initiatives increased TB detection rates by 30% in underserved rural areas, underscoring the importance of nursing involvement [81].

Addressing Diagnostic Delays

Diagnostic delays are a persistent challenge in TB care, particularly in marginalized populations. Nurses mitigate these delays by ensuring prompt referrals and follow-ups, coordinating with laboratory services, and reducing the time between symptom onset and diagnosis [82]. By providing accessible care at the community level, nurses help overcome barriers such as transportation costs and geographic inaccessibility that hinder timely diagnosis [83].

Enhancing Patient-Centered Care

Building Trust and Reducing Stigma

One of the most significant contributions of nurses in TB care is fostering trust between patients and healthcare systems. Marginalized populations often mistrust institutional healthcare due to historical injustices or previous negative experiences. Nurses, through their community engagement and empathetic care, help build this trust, encouraging patients to seek care and adhere to treatment regimens [84]. Moreover, nurses are instrumental in reducing the stigma associated with TB by providing accurate information about the disease and debunking myths that perpetuate discrimination [85].

Culturally Competent Care

Nurses are uniquely positioned to deliver culturally competent care, tailoring interventions to the specific needs and beliefs of the communities they serve. In indigenous populations, for example, nurse-led initiatives have integrated traditional healing practices with biomedical treatments, resulting in improved treatment outcomes and patient satisfaction [86]. Training programs that emphasize cultural competence equip nurses to address the unique challenges faced by diverse patient groups, ensuring equitable care delivery [87].

Promoting Treatment Adherence

Directly Observed Therapy (DOT)

Directly observed therapy (DOT) remains one of the cornerstone strategies in TB treatment adherence, and nurses are central to its implementation. In DOT programs, nurses monitor patients as they take their medications, ensuring adherence and reducing the risk of drug resistance [88]. A randomized trial in India found that nurse-led DOT programs achieved a 90% adherence rate among TB patients, significantly higher than self-administered treatment groups [89]. Additionally, nurses provide counseling on managing side effects and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, further supporting treatment adherence.

Digital Tools and Remote Monitoring

Nurses are increasingly utilizing digital tools to enhance adherence. Video-observed therapy (VOT), which allows nurses to monitor patients remotely, has been shown to be as effective as in-person DOT while reducing the logistical burden on patients [90]. Nurses play a critical role in implementing and scaling up these technologies, providing training and support to patients unfamiliar with digital platforms [91].

Addressing Co-Morbidities and Social Determinants

Managing Co-Morbidities

TB frequently co-occurs with other conditions such as HIV, diabetes, and substance use disorders, complicating treatment and care delivery. Nurses are integral to managing these co-morbidities, offering integrated care that addresses the complex needs of patients [92]. For instance, in TB-HIV co-infected patients, nurses ensure that antiretroviral therapy (ART) and TB treatment are coordinated, minimizing drug interactions and maximizing treatment efficacy [93]. Nurse-led diabetes management programs have also demonstrated success in improving outcomes for patients with TB-diabetes co-morbidity [94].

Tackling Social Determinants of Health

Nurses address social determinants of health that influence TB outcomes, such as poverty, housing instability, and food insecurity. Community health nurses often assist patients in accessing social support services, such as housing programs or nutritional supplements, to improve their overall health and treatment adherence [95]. A study in Kenya revealed that nurse-facilitated access to food assistance programs significantly reduced treatment default rates among malnourished TB patients [96].

Innovations in Community-Based Care

Community Health Worker Collaboration

Collaboration between nurses and community health workers (CHWs) has proven effective in extending TB care to hard-to-reach populations. Nurses train and supervise CHWs to conduct TB education, screening, and treatment support, enhancing the reach and impact of healthcare services [97]. This model has been particularly successful in regions with limited healthcare infrastructure, where nurses act as coordinators of decentralized TB care programs [98].

Mobile Clinics and Outreach Services

Mobile clinics led by nurses have become a critical innovation in TB care, particularly in rural and underserved areas. These clinics provide on-the-spot screening, diagnostic services, and treatment initiation, reducing the time and effort required for patients to access care [99]. In Ethiopia, nurse-led mobile clinics increased TB case detection by 25% in remote communities, demonstrating their effectiveness in bridging healthcare gaps [100].

Education and Advocacy

Patient Education

Patient education is a cornerstone of nursing contributions to TB care. Nurses provide comprehensive education about TB transmission, prevention, and treatment, empowering patients to take an active role in their care [101]. Educational interventions delivered by nurses have been shown to improve knowledge, reduce stigma, and enhance treatment adherence [102].

Advocacy for Policy and Systemic Change

Nurses are also advocates for systemic changes that address the broader challenges of TB care. They participate in policy discussions, contribute to program design, and advocate for increased funding and resources for TB programs [103]. Nurse-led advocacy efforts have been instrumental in shaping community-driven TB initiatives that prioritize patient-centered care and equity [104].

Challenges and Future Directions

Workforce Shortages

Despite their critical role, nurses face significant challenges, including workforce shortages and high workloads, which limit their ability to deliver optimal TB care [105]. Addressing these shortages through targeted recruitment, training, and retention strategies is essential for sustaining nursing contributions to TB management.

Need for Advanced Training

As the complexity of TB care increases, there is a growing need for advanced training programs that equip nurses with specialized skills in areas such as digital health, co-morbidity management, and culturally competent care [106]. Investing in continuing education for nurses will ensure that they remain at the forefront of TB care innovations.

Nursing contributions to TB care are indispensable in addressing the global burden of the disease, particularly in marginalized and underserved populations. Nurses enhance TB screening, improve treatment adherence, address co-morbidities, and tackle social determinants of health, making them central to effective TB control strategies. Through innovative community-based interventions and advocacy for systemic change, nurses play a critical role in advancing equitable and patient-centered care. However, addressing workforce challenges and investing in advanced training are necessary to sustain and expand their impact. Strengthening nursing contributions will be key to achieving global TB control targets and improving health outcomes for vulnerable populations.

Pharmacy's Role in TB Management and Public Health Strategies in TB Control

Tuberculosis (TB) continues to be a pressing global health concern, with 10.6 million new cases reported in 2021 and approximately 1.6 million deaths [107]. Effective TB management requires a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach, with pharmacy playing a critical role in ensuring successful treatment outcomes. Pharmacists contribute to TB care by optimizing medication management, improving treatment adherence, and addressing drug-resistant TB. In parallel, public health strategies are indispensable in controlling TB at the population level. These strategies focus on prevention, early diagnosis, treatment accessibility, and addressing social determinants of health. This section explores the dual contributions of pharmacy and public health in TB care, emphasizing their integration as a critical pathway toward TB elimination.

Pharmacy's Role in TB Management

1. Optimizing Pharmacotherapy

Pharmacists are central to optimizing pharmacotherapy for TB patients. TB treatment regimens are complex, often involving multiple drugs taken over a prolonged period. Pharmacists ensure the correct formulation, dosing, and administration of anti-TB drugs, preventing errors that could lead to suboptimal outcomes [108]. Their expertise is particularly crucial in managing drug-drug interactions, which are common among patients with co-morbidities such as HIV or diabetes [109].

In drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) cases, pharmacists play a vital role in selecting appropriate second-line drugs, which are often associated with severe side effects. By collaborating with healthcare providers, pharmacists help tailor treatment regimens to individual patient needs, enhancing efficacy and tolerability [110].

2. Medication Adherence Support

Non-adherence to TB treatment is a significant challenge, contributing to treatment failure, relapse, and the development of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB). Pharmacists address this issue by implementing patient-centered interventions to support adherence. Directly observed therapy (DOT), a widely used adherence strategy, often relies on pharmacists to oversee medication intake and counsel patients [111]. A study in India found that pharmacist-led DOT programs achieved a 92% treatment completion rate, significantly higher than non-supervised treatments [112].

Digital health technologies, such as mobile apps and SMS reminders, are increasingly used by pharmacists to monitor and promote adherence. These tools allow pharmacists to maintain regular contact with patients, identify potential barriers to adherence, and provide timely interventions [113].

3. Addressing Adverse Drug Reactions

Adverse drug reactions (ADRs) are a common reason for treatment discontinuation in TB patients. Pharmacists are instrumental in managing ADRs by providing education on recognizing symptoms, offering solutions to mitigate side effects, and working with prescribers to adjust regimens when necessary [114]. For example, patients experiencing hepatotoxicity—a common ADR in TB treatment—benefit from pharmacist interventions, including monitoring liver function and recommending supportive therapies [115].

4. Expanding Access to TB Medications

Pharmacists are pivotal in improving access to anti-TB medications, particularly in underserved areas. Community pharmacies often serve as accessible points for TB patients to obtain medications, reducing geographic and logistical barriers [116]. In low-resource settings, pharmacists coordinate with public health programs to ensure the availability of affordable, quality-assured medications. A recent initiative in Kenya demonstrated that pharmacy-led distribution networks increased the availability of second-line TB drugs by 30% in remote regions [117].

Public Health Strategies in TB Control

1. Preventive Measures

Public health strategies prioritize prevention to reduce TB incidence. Vaccination programs, particularly those administering the Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine, have been effective in protecting against severe TB forms in children [118]. However, the vaccine's limited efficacy in adults highlights the need for novel vaccines. Public health agencies are investing in research and development to address this gap, with several candidate vaccines currently in clinical trials [119].

Preventive therapy for latent TB infection (LTBI) is another critical strategy. Public health programs target high-risk groups, including individuals with HIV, close contacts of TB patients, and healthcare workers, offering short-course preventive regimens to reduce the risk of progression to active TB [120].

2. Screening and Early Diagnosis

Early diagnosis is crucial for effective TB control, reducing transmission and improving treatment outcomes. Public health campaigns promote community-based screening initiatives, utilizing mobile clinics and door-to-door outreach to identify symptomatic individuals [121]. Advances in diagnostic technologies, such as Xpert MTB/RIF and Truenat, have enhanced the speed and accuracy of TB detection, allowing public health systems to initiate treatment promptly [122].

In high-burden settings, targeted screening of high-risk populations, such as prisoners, migrants, and the homeless, has proven effective. A program in Brazil demonstrated a 40% reduction in TB incidence among incarcerated individuals following the implementation of routine screening and treatment protocols [123].

3. Integrated TB and HIV Services

The intersection of TB and HIV epidemics necessitates integrated care. TB is the leading cause of death among people living with HIV, accounting for one-third of AIDS-related deaths [124]. Public health strategies increasingly promote integrated TB-HIV services, enabling simultaneous diagnosis and treatment of both conditions. Co-located clinics offering antiretroviral therapy (ART) and TB care have improved patient outcomes by reducing missed appointments and delays in treatment initiation [125].

4. Addressing Social Determinants of Health

TB disproportionately affects marginalized populations, underscoring the importance of addressing social determinants of health. Public health strategies tackle poverty, malnutrition, and housing insecurity, which exacerbate TB transmission and hinder treatment adherence [126]. For instance, providing food assistance to malnourished TB patients has been associated with improved treatment outcomes [127].

Social protection programs, such as cash transfers and transportation subsidies, reduce the financial burden of seeking care, enabling patients to complete their treatment regimens [128]. A study in Peru found that patients receiving financial support were 50% more likely to complete TB treatment compared to those without support [129].

Integration of Pharmacy and Public Health Approaches

The integration of pharmacy and public health approaches is critical to achieving TB control goals. Pharmacists contribute to public health strategies by participating in community outreach programs, conducting medication education sessions, and collaborating with public health officials to design interventions tailored to local needs [130]. The involvement of pharmacists in public health campaigns has been shown to enhance the uptake of TB preventive therapy and increase awareness of TB symptoms [131].

Public health programs, in turn, benefit from the technical expertise of pharmacists in managing drug supply chains, ensuring medication quality, and implementing pharmacovigilance systems. Collaborative models, such as pharmacist-led TB adherence clinics integrated into public health frameworks, have demonstrated success in improving patient outcomes and reducing transmission [132].

Challenges and Future Directions

1. Workforce and Training Limitations

A significant challenge in pharmacy and public health efforts is the shortage of trained personnel. Many regions, particularly in low-resource settings, lack sufficient pharmacists and public health professionals to meet the demand for TB care [133]. Expanding training programs and providing incentives for healthcare workers to serve in underserved areas are critical to addressing this gap [134].

2. Sustainability of Funding

The sustainability of funding for TB programs remains a persistent concern. Global efforts to control TB are underfunded, with a $3 billion annual gap in resources needed to meet End TB Strategy targets [135]. Ensuring adequate funding for pharmacy and public health initiatives is essential to sustaining progress in TB control.

3. Leveraging Digital Technologies

The adoption of digital technologies offers significant opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of pharmacy and public health strategies. Telemedicine platforms, digital adherence tools, and electronic health records can improve coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of TB programs [136]. Future efforts should focus on integrating these technologies into routine TB care while addressing challenges such as digital literacy and infrastructure limitations [137].

Pharmacy and public health are integral to the comprehensive management and control of TB. Pharmacists optimize pharmacotherapy, support treatment adherence, and expand access to medications, while public health strategies address prevention, early diagnosis, and the social determinants of health. The integration of these disciplines has the potential to transform TB care, enhancing patient outcomes and reducing disease transmission. However, addressing workforce shortages, securing sustainable funding, and leveraging digital technologies are essential to realizing this potential. Strengthening collaboration between pharmacy and public health will be critical to achieving global TB elimination targets.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration Models and Recommendations for Practice and Policy

The management and control of tuberculosis (TB), particularly among marginalized populations, necessitate an interdisciplinary approach. TB is a complex disease influenced by biological, social, and systemic factors that require integrated efforts from various healthcare professionals and sectors. Interdisciplinary collaboration combines the strengths of multiple disciplines—nursing, pharmacy, public health, and beyond—to address TB at individual, community, and policy levels. This section explores effective models of interdisciplinary collaboration, identifies challenges in implementing these models, and provides evidence-based recommendations for enhancing practice and policy.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration Models

Integrated Care Models

Integrated care models bring together healthcare professionals from different disciplines to provide coordinated services tailored to TB patients' needs. Such models emphasize shared decision-making, real-time communication, and a patient-centered approach.

A prominent example is the integration of TB and HIV care. Co-infection with TB and HIV remains a significant challenge, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Integrated care models enable simultaneous diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring of both conditions in co-located facilities. These programs rely on collaboration among nurses, pharmacists, and public health workers to streamline care delivery and improve outcomes [138]. A study in South Africa demonstrated that integrated TB-HIV services reduced mortality by 25% compared to standalone services [139].

Community-Based Collaboration

Community-based TB programs involve interdisciplinary teams comprising community health workers (CHWs), nurses, and pharmacists working in close coordination with public health officials. These programs extend healthcare services to remote and underserved areas, leveraging local resources and community trust to enhance TB care access [140].

For instance, in India's Revised National TB Control Program, CHWs collaborate with nurses and pharmacists to deliver directly observed therapy (DOT), monitor treatment adherence, and conduct health education campaigns. This collaboration has improved treatment completion rates and reduced TB incidence in rural regions [141].

Digital Health Integration

Digital health tools facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration by enabling communication, data sharing, and remote monitoring. Telemedicine platforms connect primary care providers with TB specialists, allowing for virtual consultations and case reviews. Digital adherence technologies, such as video-observed therapy (VOT), involve pharmacists, nurses, and public health workers in monitoring patient adherence remotely [142]. A pilot program in Kenya found that VOT reduced treatment default rates by 30% compared to traditional DOT [143].

Multi-Sectoral Approaches

Multi-sectoral approaches extend interdisciplinary collaboration beyond the healthcare system by involving sectors such as education, housing, and social welfare. These approaches recognize that TB is not solely a medical issue but is deeply rooted in social determinants of health.

One example is Peru's comprehensive TB program, which integrates healthcare services with housing assistance and nutritional support. By addressing the socio-economic factors contributing to TB, the program achieved a 40% reduction in TB prevalence over five years [144]. These models highlight the importance of combining healthcare expertise with social policy interventions.

Challenges in Implementing Interdisciplinary Models

Fragmented Communication

Effective interdisciplinary collaboration requires seamless communication among team members. However, in many healthcare systems, communication remains fragmented due to siloed operations and a lack of shared digital platforms [145]. For example, delays in reporting diagnostic results between laboratories and treatment centers hinder timely care delivery.

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity often arises when team members are unclear about their responsibilities within interdisciplinary models. This can lead to duplication of efforts or critical gaps in care. A study in Ethiopia revealed that unclear roles among CHWs and nurses led to inconsistent follow-ups for TB patients [146].

Resource Constraints

Resource limitations, including funding shortages, inadequate staffing, and lack of infrastructure, pose significant barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration. In low-income settings, these constraints often limit the scalability of integrated care models [147].

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change among healthcare professionals can impede the adoption of interdisciplinary practices. Traditional hierarchies and professional silos may foster reluctance to embrace collaborative approaches, particularly in systems where vertical disease programs dominate [148].

Recommendations for Practice and Policy

Strengthening Interdisciplinary Education

Interdisciplinary collaboration begins with education. Training programs for healthcare professionals should incorporate interdisciplinary curricula that emphasize teamwork, communication, and role clarity. Simulation-based training exercises, where students from nursing, pharmacy, and public health work together on case studies, can foster collaboration skills [149]. The integration of interdisciplinary competencies into accreditation standards for healthcare training programs is essential to institutionalize this approach.

Investing in Digital Infrastructure

Expanding digital infrastructure is critical to facilitating collaboration among interdisciplinary teams. Shared electronic health records (EHRs) and telehealth platforms enable real-time communication and data sharing, improving care coordination [150]. Policymakers should prioritize investments in digital tools, particularly in resource-limited settings, to support interdisciplinary models.

Establishing Clear Roles and Responsibilities

To address role ambiguity, healthcare systems must define clear roles and responsibilities for each team member. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) should outline the contributions of nurses, pharmacists, CHWs, and public health officials in TB care delivery [151]. Regular team meetings and performance reviews can help align efforts and ensure accountability.

Expanding Community-Based Models

Community-based models should be scaled up to reach marginalized populations effectively. Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should invest in training and deploying CHWs, equipping them with digital tools and resources to enhance their impact [152]. Partnerships with local leaders and organizations can further strengthen the reach and sustainability of community-based initiatives.

Enhancing Multi-Sectoral Collaboration

Policy frameworks should promote collaboration across sectors to address the social determinants of TB. Housing programs, nutritional support, and cash transfer initiatives should be integrated into TB care strategies. Public health agencies must work with social welfare departments to design and implement these interventions at scale [153].

Securing Sustainable Funding

Sustainable funding is essential for the success of interdisciplinary models. Governments should increase domestic investments in TB programs, complemented by international funding from organizations such as the Global Fund and the World Bank. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships and social impact bonds, can also provide additional resources for TB care [154].

Promoting Policy Integration

National TB programs should align with broader health policies to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration. For instance, integrating TB care into primary healthcare systems ensures that services are accessible and comprehensive. Policies should also prioritize the integration of TB and HIV services, given their overlapping burden [155].

Monitoring and Evaluation

Robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks are critical to assessing the effectiveness of interdisciplinary models. Policymakers should establish M&E indicators that measure outcomes such as treatment adherence, patient satisfaction, and team collaboration [156]. Regular evaluations can identify best practices and areas for improvement, guiding future policy and practice.

Future Directions

The evolving landscape of TB care offers several opportunities for advancing interdisciplinary collaboration. Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, can enhance diagnostic accuracy and predict treatment adherence, providing valuable tools for interdisciplinary teams [157]. Additionally, global initiatives such as the WHO's End TB Strategy provide a platform for countries to share experiences and scale successful models of interdisciplinary collaboration [158].

Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for addressing the complex challenges of TB care and control. By integrating the expertise of nurses, pharmacists, public health officials, and other stakeholders, interdisciplinary models enhance care delivery, improve patient outcomes, and address social determinants of health. Despite challenges such as resource constraints and fragmented communication, targeted investments in education, digital infrastructure, and policy integration can overcome these barriers. Scaling up successful interdisciplinary models and promoting cross-sectoral collaboration will be critical to achieving global TB elimination targets.

Conclusion

Tuberculosis (TB) remains a formidable global health challenge, particularly among marginalized populations who face disproportionate barriers to care. The intricate interplay of social determinants, structural inequities, and resource limitations necessitates an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to TB control. This paper underscores the critical contributions of nursing, pharmacy, and public health disciplines in addressing the complexities of TB care, from early detection and culturally competent interventions to treatment adherence and management of drug-resistant cases. Interdisciplinary collaboration models, such as integrated TB-HIV care, community-based programs, and digital health tools, demonstrate significant promise in improving TB outcomes, particularly in resource-limited settings.

Despite these advances, challenges persist in the form of fragmented communication, role ambiguity, resource shortages, and systemic resistance to collaborative approaches. Addressing these barriers requires targeted investments in interdisciplinary education, digital infrastructure, and sustainable financing mechanisms. The integration of TB care into broader primary healthcare systems, coupled with multi-sectoral collaboration to address social determinants of health, is critical for achieving equitable and effective TB control.

Policy reforms must prioritize the alignment of national TB programs with global health targets, such as those outlined in the WHO's End TB Strategy. Robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks will be essential for assessing the effectiveness of interventions and scaling successful models. Ultimately, the path to TB elimination hinges on fostering a unified, interdisciplinary response that combines the expertise of healthcare professionals, policymakers, and communities to deliver patient-centered, equitable care. Only through such collective action can we hope to eradicate TB as a public health threat and advance health equity on a global scale.

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تحسين فحص السل و معدلات إكمال العلاج بين الفئات المهمشة منهجية متعددة التخصصات

ملخص

الخلفية: لا يزال السل يشكل تحديًا صحيًا عالميًا رئيسيًا، حيث يؤثر بشكل غير متناسب على الفئات المهمشة. تلعب المحددات الاجتماعية مثل الفقر، الوصمة الاجتماعية، ضعف الوصول إلى الرعاية الصحية، والتفاوتات النظامية دورًا في إعاقة الفحص المبكر وإكمال العلاج. وقد أظهرت الأساليب التقليدية للرعاية الصحية قصورًا في مواجهة هذه التحديات المتعددة الأبعاد، مما يستدعي استجابة شاملة متعددة التخصصات تجمع بين مجالات التمريض والصيدلة والصحة العامة.

الهدف: يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقييم دور النهج متعدد التخصصات في تحسين معدلات فحص السل وإكمال العلاج بين الفئات المهمشة. يسعى البحث إلى استكشاف استراتيجيات فعالة تقلل من العوائق وتعزز نتائج رعاية مرضى السل من خلال التكامل بين التمريض والصيدلة والصحة العامة.

الطرق: تم إجراء مراجعة شاملة للأدبيات باستخدام الدراسات المنشورة والتقارير الصحية العالمية ودراسات الحالة لفحص تأثير النماذج متعددة التخصصات على رعاية مرضى السل. ركزت المراجعة على تدخلات التمريض المجتمعية، استراتيجيات الالتزام بالعلاج الصيدلي، وسياسات الصحة العامة التي تستهدف الفئات المهمشة. كما تم تحليل نماذج التكامل بين هذه التخصصات.

النتائج: أظهرت النماذج متعددة التخصصات تحسنًا ملحوظًا في معدلات فحص السل والالتزام بالعلاج بين الفئات المهمشة. عززت تدخلات التمريض التفاعل مع المرضى من خلال التثقيف الثقافي والمتابعة. ساهمت خدمات الصيدلة في تحسين الوصول إلى الأدوية ودعم الالتزام بالعلاج، بينما عالجت استراتيجيات الصحة العامة الحواجز البنيوية عبر التوعية المجتمعية والإصلاحات السياسية. أبرزت البرامج الناجحة أهمية التعاون والرعاية المرتكزة على المجتمع.

الخلاصة: يقدم النهج متعدد التخصصات مسارًا واعدًا لتقليل التفاوتات في رعاية مرضى السل بين الفئات المهمشة. يساهم تكامل التمريض والصيدلة والصحة العامة في معالجة الحواجز النظامية وتعزيز تقديم الرعاية الصحية بشكل عادل. يمكن لتوسيع نطاق هذه النماذج أن يُحسن من رعاية مرضى السل ويُستخدم كنموذج للتصدي لتفاوتات صحية أخرى معقدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السل، الفئات المهمشة، النهج متعدد التخصصات، التمريض، الصيدلة، الصحة العامة، الالتزام بالعلاج، العدالة الصحية.