



LANDMARK TRIAL

New TB test could help curb disease

Lisa Isaacs

A RECENT landmark trial showed 53% more patients initiated therapy for tuberculosis (TB) after a new DNA-based diagnostic tool was used to screen for the disease in more than 2 261 individuals.

Experts say the test, called GeneXpert MTB/RIF will improve the battle strategy against TB by finding undiagnosed cases in communities.

The trial funded by The European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) and the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), is geared to inform control strategies for TB-endemic countries.

The trial will also suggest point of care technologies, such as the portable GeneXpert Omni Platform could effectively be used to find undiagnosed cases of TB and therefore limit the transmission of TB in communities with high tuberculosis and HIV prevalence.

The trial was conducted in Cape Town and Harare, Zimbabwe. UCT Professor of Medicine Keertan Dheda said: "Our goal is to ensure that undiagnosed patients in the community are detected and taken up in the health-care system, adhere to treatment, lead healthy productive

lives and in so doing, curb the spread of TB in our communities."

TB remains a global health emergency with the SAMRC saying one person dies of TB every three minutes globally.

As much as 30-40% of cases globally remain undiagnosed in TB-endemic countries..

The diagnostic gap at the point of care impedes the ability of medical personnel to rapidly diagnose TB in patients, ultimately slowing the progress to treatment and care, the SAMRC says.

Health-care workers, using GeneXpert, were able to detect more cases of TB in remote communities.

Using a mobile van, the team was able transfer primary health care to the location of people who would normally not have convenient access to those services.

It was also evident access to these communities significantly reduced the time to initiate treatment, the SAMRC said.

SAMRC president Prof Glenda Gray said: "The major hurdle to finding TB at a community level was the lack of a sensitive and user-friendly diagnostic test.

"If we can find an easy test for TB and take this to scale, we are on a trajectory to improve our battle against this global killer."

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