



TB research in Europe

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Complementing the high level policy work of WHO and international agencies, the European Respiratory Society (ERS) has launched the European Forum for TB Innovation in order to stimulate discussions on how to best take advantage of new opportunities and advances to improve TB control and eventually progress towards TB elimination. The current TB and MDR/extensively drug-resistant (XDR)-TB control situation represents an opportunity for refocusing and optimizing control strategies. In particular, the introduction of new diagnostic tools that might enable a rapid identification of drug-resistant TB (MDR/XDR-TB), the shift towards active case finding, new control approaches and a promising TB drug pipeline allow for a positive outlook towards the future.

The development of new tools and approaches for TB control can finally bring about the much-needed shake-up of the management of TB, and it is time to recognize that innovation goes beyond the introduction of new technologies and drugs, and essentially requires a new mind frame in the fight against the disease.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the ERS jointly developed European Union Standards for Tuberculosis Care (ESTC) aimed at providing European Union (EU)-tailored standards for the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of tuberculosis. These patient-centred standards are targeted to clinicians and public health workers, providing an easy-to-use resource, guiding through all required activities to ensure optimal diagnosis, treatment and prevention of TB. These will support EU health programmes to identify and develop optimal procedures for TB care, control and elimination.

The WHO recommends that management of MDR-TB cases is supervised by a specialised team, including complementary medical professionals able to cover several perspectives (clinical, both for adults and children; surgical; radiological; public health; psychological; and nursing, among others). Implementation of such a body (known as a consilium in some countries belonging to the former Soviet Union) is a requisite to apply for international TB control funding and concessionary pricing of medicines to treat MDR- and XDR-TB cases.

On this line and after consultation with WHO/Europe and ECDC, and under the ERS Presidential initiative, the ERS-WHO Electronic Consilium was launched during the 22nd ERS Congress in Vienna, on September 6, 2012. The WHO Regional Office for Europe signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the ERS to coordinate and co-manage this initiative, which also has the support of ECDC in public health and monitoring and evaluation aspects.

The overarching aim of this initiative is to provide scientifically sound and evidence-based advice to national consilia and individual clinicians.

The ERS/WHO Consilium will provide a free-to-access, bilingual (English and Russian) internet-based consultation system able to provide suggestions on clinical management of complicated TB cases with a turnaround time of about 1 week. The launch of the initiative has been followed with a call for experts (including TB clinicians, but also other professionals relevant for patient management). The expert applications have then been reviewed and validated by a ERS/WHO/ ECDC review team based on strict criteria. As well as supporting clinicians in Europe (and eventually, in a second phase, outside of Europe), the system will also enable evaluation of the trends in key challenges and pitfalls which can be addressed through human resources capacity building, including MDR- and XDR-TB management practices (e.g. diagnostic and prescription habits), and clinicians' compliance with WHO and other international, evidence-based guidelines. The system will also enable evaluation of trends over time.

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