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Success story

The benefits of tuberculosis screening among health professionals

MJ, a 29-year-old general nurse, was diagnosed with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) in 2018. He had been battling a three-week fever, weight loss, headaches, nausea and vomiting. He had been seen by a clinician and received tests for various ailments, including malaria, all of which came back negative. Over the course of three weeks, MJ submitted three sputum samples for TB testing by microscopy, which, again, all came back negative. In the third week, a chest X-ray was taken, showing results suggestive of TB, and MJ was immediately started on treatment for drug-sensitive TB.

Mozambique has seen an increase in TB, including MDR-TB, among health professionals. According to the National Tuberculosis Program 2017 report, the number of health professionals with TB increased from 231 in 2015 to 425 in 2017. Although Ministry of Health protocols prescribe biannual screening of health professionals working in high-risk areas and require health facilities to provide medical appointments for health care workers and their families, these services are not being provided as expected. To address these issues, Challenge TB (CTB) Mozambique has initiated screening activities targeting health care workers.

In February 2018, a team composed of the provincial TB supervisor, the CTB clinical officer, the laboratory manager from the Nampula reference laboratory and the CTB technical laboratory officer went to Nacala Porto city in Nampula province for a week-long campaign to screen for TB among health care providers. The team screened a total of 387 health workers, of whom 108 (28 percent) had symptoms suggestive of TB. From those with symptoms, 100 (93 percent) submitted sputum samples for testing at the regional laboratory. Two health care professionals were diagnosed with TB, one of which had MDR-TB. MJ was that MDR-TB patient.

Three days into his treatment for drug-sensitive TB, MJ heard about the campaign led by CTB and went to the health facility for additional examination. The TB supervisor at the facility collected his sputum and immediately requested testing using GeneXpert. The result came back the next day showing that MJ had rifampicin-resistant TB, and MJ was immediately switched to the 24-month treatment regimen for MDR-TB. In addition, his whole family was screened for TB. Luckily, none of them showed any signs or symptoms of the disease.

It has been three months since MJ started treatment for MDR-TB, and his health is already improving. He is feeling better, his weight has increased, and he is being seen at a health facility, with support from the National Tuberculosis Program supervisor and a local physician.

“Now I’m very well, and my weight is getting to the normal. In the beginning of the treatment, I wanted to stop it due to adverse drug reactions, but I had the support of the

head of medical and MDR-TB focal point, who both advised me to continue the treatment. I'm very grateful." – MJ

The screening activities that took place in Nacala Porto are part of a larger campaign initiated by CTB in 2017, which focuses on screening health professionals throughout Nampula province. To date, the campaign has resulted in 64 notified TB cases among health professionals – one of the highest notification rates in the country.

"For me, [this] is a huge victory. Thanks to the support I'm receiving at the health facility, now I'm much better, and I can perform my activities, even though I'm not yet back to work. I'm very grateful." – MJ