NON-COMMERCIAL CULTURE METHODS AND MYCOBACTERIOPHAGE-BASED ASSAYS FOR RAPID SCREENING OF PATIENTS AT RISK OF DRUG-RESISTANT TUBERCULOSIS

- EXPERT GROUP MEETING -

Date and time: 8 - 9 September 2009, 09:00 – 18:00
Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Geneva, Switzerland

BACKGROUND

Early detection of drug resistance in tuberculosis (TB) allows the use of appropriate treatment regimens for patients, which has an important impact for improved TB control. The development of rapid methods for drug susceptibility testing (DST) is crucial due to increasing rates of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) worldwide and the emergence of extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB), with very high reported HIV-associated mortality. Spread of drug resistant strains of Mycobacterium tuberculosis and the management of patients diagnosed with drug resistant disease is one of the most formidable obstacles faced by national tuberculosis control programmes, compounded by a critical lack of appropriate diagnostic tools and vastly inadequate laboratory capacity.

Conventional culture and DST methods require prolonged periods to confirm mycobacterial growth and detect drug resistance, during which time patients may be inappropriately treated, drug resistant strains may continue to spread, and amplification of resistance may occur. Rapid diagnosis of TB and drug resistance will therefore have obvious patient- as well as public health benefits, including better prognosis, increased survival, prevention of acquisition of further drug resistance, and reduced spread of drug resistant strains to vulnerable populations.

Commercially available liquid culture systems and molecular line probe assays for rapid detection of MDR-TB have been endorsed by WHO; however, due to their complexity and cost, as well as the need for sophisticated laboratory infrastructure, uptake has been limited in many resource-constrained settings. Several non-commercial culture and DST methods have been developed at the same time, aimed at use in laboratories that lack access to more sophisticated infrastructure and techniques. Among these methods, microscopic observation of drug susceptibility (MODS), thin layer agar (TLA), colorimetric redox indicator (CRI) method nitrate reductase assay (NRA) and mycobacteriophage-based assays have shown promise as rapid, inexpensive methods.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION: EVIDENCE-BASED PROCESS FOR POLICY GUIDANCE

In order to facilitate rapid policy guidance on the use of new diagnostic tools, new methods, and/or novel approaches using existing tools, WHO has recently developed a systematic, structured, evidence-based process. The first step constitutes a systematic review and meta-analysis of available data, using standard methods appropriate for diagnostic accuracy studies. The second step involves the convening of an Expert Group to evaluate the strength of the evidence base and recommend operational and logistical considerations for mainstreaming such tools/approaches into national TB control programmes, and/or identify gaps to be addressed in future research. The third and final step involves WHO policy guidance on the use of these tools/approaches, presented to the WHO Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for TB (STAG-TB) for endorsement and subsequent dissemination to member states for implementation.
MEETING OBJECTIVES

- To review the evidence base and evaluate data from systematic reviews commissioned by WHO on the performance characteristics of non-commercial culture methods and mycobacteriophage-based assays for rapid diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis;
- To evaluate preliminary data from field demonstration projects on non-commercial culture methods and mycobacteriophage-based assays for rapid diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis;
- To define the laboratory infrastructure, human resource requirements, and further operational research data needed for programmatic implementation of non-commercial culture methods and mycobacteriophage-based assays for rapid diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis;
- To outline potential issues to be addressed by WHO in subsequent policy recommendations;

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Evidence-based recommendations on the use of non-commercial culture methods and mycobacteriophage-based assays for rapid screening of patients with drug-resistant tuberculosis;
- Consensus on laboratory infrastructure, human resource requirements and further research data needed for programmatic implementation of non-commercial culture methods and mycobacteriophage-based assays for rapid diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis;
- Development of WHO policy guidance on the use of non-commercial culture methods and mycobacteriophage-based assays for rapid diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis.
# PROVISIONAL AGENDA

**Tuesday 8 September 2009**

Chair: P Nunn & K Weyer, WHO  
Rapporteur: F Cobelens

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<th>Time</th>
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<td>08:30 - 08:40</td>
<td>Welcome</td>
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| 08:40 - 08:50 | Introduction  
Meeting scope and objectives                                           | K Weyer                       |
| 08:50 - 09:00 | Declaration of Interest by Expert Group members                          | Chair                         |
| 09:00 - 09:15 | Grading quality of evidence and strength of recommendations: Brief overview of GRADE | K Steingart                   |
| 09:15 - 09:45 | Systematic review: Microscopic observation of drug susceptibility (MODS) for rapid diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis | J Minion & M Pai              |
| 09:45 - 10:15 | Discussion                                                               | All                           |
|               | **BREAK 10:15 - 10:30**                                                 |                               |
| 10:30 - 10:50 | Laboratory infrastructure, human resource requirements, and research gaps for implementation of MODS | D Moore                       |
| 10:50 - 11:30 | Discussion                                                               | All                           |
| 11:30 - 12:00 | Draft recommendations                                                    | All                           |
|               | **LUNCH 12:00 - 13:00**                                                 |                               |
| 13:00 - 13:30 | Systematic review: Nitrate reductase assay (NRA) for rapid diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis | A Martin                      |
| 13:30 - 14:15 | Discussion                                                               | All                           |
| 14:15 - 14:35 | Laboratory infrastructure, human resource requirements, and research gaps for implementation of NRA | L Barrera                     |
| 14:35 - 15:00 | Discussion                                                               | All                           |
| 15:00 - 15:30 | Draft recommendations                                                    | All                           |
|               | **BREAK 15:30 - 15:45**                                                 |                               |
| 15:45- 16:15  | Systematic review: Colorimetric redox indicator method (CRI) for rapid diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis | A Martin                      |
| 16:15 - 16:45 | Discussion                                                               | All                           |
| 16:45 - 17:00 | Laboratory infrastructure, human resource requirements, and research gaps for implementation of CRI | L Barrera                     |
| 17:00 - 17:30 | Discussion                                                               | All                           |
| 17:30 - 18:00 | Draft recommendations                                                    | All                           |
**Wednesday 9 September 2009**

Chair: P Nunn & K Weyer, WHO  
Rapporteur: F Cobelens

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<td>Laboratory infrastructure, human resource requirements, and research gaps for implementation of TLA</td>
<td>J Robledo</td>
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<td>13:00 - 13:30</td>
<td>Systematic review: Mycobacteriophage-based assays for rapid diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis</td>
<td>J Minion &amp; M Pai</td>
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<td>Laboratory infrastructure, human resource requirements, and research gaps for implementation of mycobacteriophage-based assays</td>
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<td>GRADE summary</td>
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<td>Final recommendations</td>
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<td>16:45 - 17:00</td>
<td>Next steps and closing</td>
<td>Chair</td>
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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

EXPERT GROUP

Dr Lucia Barrera
Head of WHO/IUATLD Supranational Reference Laboratory for Tuberculosis
Jefe Servicio Micobacterias
INEI ANLIS Dr CG Malbran
Velez Sarsfield 563
1281 Buenos Aires
Argentina
Tel: 0054 11 4983 4072
e-mail: lbarrera@anlis.gov.ar

Dr Cesar Bonilla Asalde
TB Strategy for National Control and Prevention
TB/Leprosy Control Programme
Ministry of Health, Casillia 2117
Los Opalos 225 - Urbanizyacion Benjamin Doig - La Perla Callao
Salaverry Avenue 801 - Jesus Maria
Lima 11, Peru
Tel: 0051 22 749 8940
e-mail: cesarbon@yahoo.es; cbonilla@aminsa.gob.pe

Dr Maryline Bonnet
Epicentre, c/o MSFCH
78 Rue de Lausanne
116 - CH, 1211 Geneva
Switzerland
Tel: 0041 22 849 8940
e-mail: maryline.bonnet@geneva.msf.org

Dr Frank J Cobelens
Deputy director, AMC CPCD Foundation
Centre for Poverty-related Communicable Diseases
affiliated to the Academic Medical Center, University of Amsterdam
Meibergdreef 9, room T.0.-126
1105 AZ Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel: 0031 20 566 8403/7800
Fax: 0031 20 566 9557
e-mail: CobelensF@kncvttbc.nl

Prof Francis Drobniewski
Head of WHO-IUATLD Supranational Reference Laboratory for Tuberculosis
Health Protection Agency
National Mycobacterium Reference Unit
Head: Clinical TB and HIV Group
Clinical Sciences Research Centre
2 Newark Street, E1 AT-London
United Kingdom
Tel: 0044 207 377 5895
Fax: 0044 207 539 3459
e-mail: f.drobniewski@qmul.ac.uk

Dr Knut Feldman
Head: WHO-IUATLD Supranational Reference Laboratory for Tuberculosis
Kuratorium Tuberkulose in der Welt e.V
Robert Koch Allee 2
82131 - Gauting
Germany
Tel: 0049 89 5791 8231
e-mail: knut.feldmann@alice-dsl.net

Dr Christopher Gilpin
Global Laboratory Manager
International Organization for Migration
17 route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva
Switzerland
Tel: 0041 22 717 9293
Fax: 0041 22 798 6150
Email: cgilpin@iom.int

Dr Willie A. Githui
Kenya Medical Research Institute,
KEMRI
Centre for Respiratory Diseases
Research CRDR
P.O. Box 47855
Nairobi
Kenya
Tel: 00254 2 72 4264/65
Fax: 00254 2 72 9308/2 72 0030
Email: wgithui@yahoo.com

Dr Christy Hanson
Chair: STP Retooling Task Force
US Agency for International Development (USAID)
USAID/BGH/HIDN/ID
3.7.23, 3rd Floor
Ronald Reagan Building
20523-5900 - Washington, DC
USA
Tel: 001 202 712 5429
Fax: 001 612 554 2379
e-mail: chanson@usaid.gov

Dr Moses Joloba
Head of National TB Reference Laboratory
Department of Medical Microbiology
Microbiology-Pathology Building
Uganda
Tel: 00256 41 541 830 (Office)
00256 782 752 582 (Mobile)
Fax: 00256 41 453 3033
e-mail: moses.joloba@case.edu
Dr Anandi Martin
Institute of Tropical Medicine
Mycobacteriology Unit
Nationalestraat 155
2000 Antwerp
Belgium
Tel: 0032 3 247 6666
Fax: 0032 3 216 1431
Email: amartin@itg.be

Dr Madhukar Pai
Co-Chair of Subgroup on Evidence Synthesis for TB Diagnostics, STP New Diagnostics Working Group
Assistant Professor
Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics & Occupational Health
McGill University
1020 Pine Avenue West
Montreal, H3A 1A2
CANADA
Tel: 00514 398 5422 (Office)
00514 952 6604 (Mobile)
Fax: 00514 398 4503
e-mail: madhukar.pai@mcgill.ca

Dr John Ridderhof
Chair of STP Global Laboratory Initiative Working Group
Associate Director for Laboratory Science
National Center for Preparedness, Detection and Control of Infectious Diseases, CCID
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd NE, MS-C12
Atlanta, Georgia 30333
USA
Tel: 00404 718 1057
Fax: 00404 639 3039
e-mail: jridderhof@cdc.gov

Dr Jaime Robledo Restrepo
Corporacion para Investigaciones Biologicas
Cra 72A No. 78B-141
Medellin
Colombia
Tel: 00404 718 1057
Fax: 00404 639 3039
e-mail: jrobedo@cib.org.co

Dr Karen Steingart
Francis J. Curry National Tuberculosis Center
University of California, San Francisco
3180 18th Street, Suite 101
San Francisco, CA 94110-2028
USA
Tel: 001 415 502 4600
Fax: 001 415 502 4620
e-mail: karenst@u.washington.edu

Dr Javid Syed
TB/HIV Project Director
Treatment Action Group
611 Broadway, Suite 308
New York, NY 10012
USA
Tel: 001 212 253 7922
Fax: 001 212 253 7923
e-mail: javid.syed@treatmentactiongroup.org

Dr Armand van Deun
Bacteriology Consultant
International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease
Mycobacteriology Unit
Institute of Tropical Medicine
Nationalestraat 155
B-2000 - Antwerpen
Belgium
Tel: 00323 2476 548
Fax: 00323 2476 333
e-mail: avandeun@iuatld.org

Adithya Cattamanchi, MD
Assistant Professor of Medicine
San Francisco General Hospital
Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine
Room 5K1
1001 Potrero Avenue
San Francisco, California 94110
Telephone: (415) 206-5489
Fax: (415) 695-1551
e-mail: cattamanchi@medsfgh.ucsf.edu

Dr Jessica Minion
Medical Microbiology
MSc Epidemiology
McGill University
1020 Pine Avenue West
Montreal, H3A 1A2, Canada
e-mail: jessica.minion@mail.mcgill.ca

Dr Juan Carlos Palomino
Institute of Tropical Medicine Mycobacteriology Unit
Nationalestraat 156
2000 - Antwerp
Belgium
Tel: 32-3-247 6334
Fax: 32-3-247 6333
e-mail: palomino@itg.be
J. Lucian Davis  
MD, MAS,  
Assistant Professor of Medicine  
San Francisco General Hospital  
Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine  
Room 5K1,1001 Potrero Avenue  
San Francisco, California  94110  
Email: lucian.davis@ucsf.edu

FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATIVE NEW DIAGNOSTICS (FIND)

Dr CN Paramasivan  
Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND)  
71 Avenue Louis-Casai  
1216 Geneva  
Switzerland  
Tel: 0041 22 710 0592  
Fax: 0041 22 710 0599  
e-mail: CN.paramasivan@finddiagnostics.org

Dr Mark Perkins  
Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND)  
71 Avenue Louis-Casai  
1216 Geneva  
Switzerland  
Tel: 0041 22 710 0592  
Fax: 0041 22 710 0599  
e-mail: mark.perkins@finddiagnostics.org

Dr Eric Adam  
Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND)  
71 Avenue Louis-Casai  
1216 Geneva  
Switzerland  
Tel: 0041 79 540 1589  
email: eric.adam@finddiagnostics.org

WHO-STB

Leopold Blanc: blancl@who.int  
Jean Iragena: iragenaj@who.int  
Christian Lienhardt: lienhardt@who.int  
Eva Nathanson: nathansone@who.int  
Paul Nunn: nunnp@who.int  
Ikushi Onozaki: onozakii@who.int  
Veronique Vincent: vincentv@who.int  
Diana Weil: weild@who.int  
Karin Weyer: weyerk@who.int  
Matteo Zignol: zgnolm@who.int

WHO-TDR

L Cuevas: cuevasl@who.int  
F Moussy: moussyf@who.int  
Andrew Ramsay: ramsaya@who.int  
Sanne Van Kampen: vankampens@who.int

WHO-OTHER

WHO Guidelines Review Committee  
Secretariat: grcsecretariat@who.int

OTHER

Dr D. Moore  
Heredia  
Laboratorio de Investigacion de Enfermedades Infecciosas (UPCH)  
San Martin de Porras  
Lima  31  
Peru  
Tel:00404 718 1057  
Fax:00404 639 3039  
e-mail: davidajmoore@msn.com