

Community health workers role in DOTS

An NGO in Bangladesh describes how community health workers helped to increase detection and cure of TB.



In 1984, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) – working closely with the national TB control programme – started an experimental programme in one sub-district, using community health workers. The programme was expanded to an additional 17 sub-districts during 1992-1995. In 1995, the TB treatment regimen changed from 12 to 8 months, in accordance with changes in national policy.

BRAC community health workers are village women who have been trained to work in rural development programmes. They are selected from BRAC village organisations, which consist of women from the poorest socio-economic groups. Each community health worker covers 200 households and is supervised by BRAC doctors and field staff. The community health workers educate the community about TB, follow up individuals who have had a cough for more than four weeks, collect sputum samples, contact positive patients to register them for treatment, and observe TB patients taking their treatment.

Patients who are willing to participate are asked to pay a deposit of 200 Taka (about US\$5.00), and to sign a written agreement as an incentive to complete their course of treatment. At the end of the treatment, 100 Taka is returned to them and the rest is given to the community health worker. The village organisation pays if the individual is unable to afford the deposit. The community health worker also receives 25 Taka for each new or relapsed case she identifies.

Community health workers have shown that they can help identify people with TB and achieve high levels of treatment adherence in their villages. Evaluation of the programme found that it has achieved cure rates of over 85%, with a drop-out rate of around 3%, and that the prevalence of TB in the sub-districts covered by the community health worker DOTS approach was half that of sub-districts where treatment was clinic based.

*A Mushtaque Chowdhury et al, 1997
Control of tuberculosis by community health workers in Bangladesh.
Lancet 350:169-72.*

Community health workers play an essential part in monitoring the health of their communities.