

Tuberculosis awareness session for adult medical laymen – a quiz

Good morning. My name is [...] and I am working for Howrah South Point / for the St. Thomas Home since [...] years. In this organization, I am taking care for patients with tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis is one of the most important diseases in India. And the more people know something about this disease, the better the disease can be controlled. Some basic knowledge about how tuberculosis strikes and what everyone can do to stop this disease can avoid unnecessary suffering, for example of you and of your family members.

Therefore, I want to explain tuberculosis to you a bit within the next few minutes. I don't want to stand here and speak about tuberculosis while you shall listen only. We will do it as some type of quiz. I will ask some questions about tuberculosis and I will give you three possible answers for every question. Only one of the three answers that I am giving is right, the other both answers are wrong. Then, you kindly tell me what you believe, which of the three answers is right.

This is not a school session or school examination. We shall do this talk with a bit of fun. If you don't want to answer on any question it is no problem.

Please note that I will use the abbreviation "TB" sometimes instead of the full name of the disease, "tuberculosis".

Let us start now with question number one:

Question number 1: What do you think, which kind of disease is tuberculosis?

Answer 1: It is like cancer, it confers life-long suffering, and all patients will eventually die.

Answer 2: It is like the "sugar" disease, means lifelong treatment and some patients will die.

Answer 3: It is an infectious disease, caused by germs, that can be cured with an antibiotic treatment that lasts several months.

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by germs, similar as Malaria, Typhoid fever, or infection with the Coronavirus are infectious diseases. Tuberculosis is different from these other infectious diseases only regarding the antibiotic treatment, that needs to be given to control the disease. Cure of a tuberculosis patient with antibiotic drugs takes much more time as the treatment of Malaria or Typhoid fever.

It is not a lifelong disease, and survival chances are good, if one takes the antibiotic drugs regularly and for the stipulated time.

Question number 2: Which country of the world has the most TB patients?

Answer 1: China.

Answer 2: India.

Answer 3: Indonesia.

India is the country with the most TB-patients in the world. China and Indonesia have high number, too, but less than India.

Question number 3: How many people in India fall sick every year with tuberculosis?

Answer 1: Around one lakh to two lakhs.

Answer 2: Around 27 lakhs.

Answer 3: Around one crore.

Nobody knows the exact number of persons who fall sick with TB in India every year, because there is no institution that counts them all over the country. Therefore, we have only an estimate of the number of new TB-patients in one year in India, and this is, according to scientists and World Health Organization, 27 lakhs.

Question number 4: In which country of the world do the most TB patients die?

Answer 1: Nigeria (Africa).

Answer 2: Bangladesh.

Answer 3: India.

Unfortunately, India is the country in which most TB patients die worldwide. However, there is no institution that counts the number of deaths by TB everywhere in the country. Many deaths from TB go unnoticed by any Government institution.

Question number 5: How many people die every year from tuberculosis in India?

Answer 1: Around 50.000.

Answer 2: Around 4,5 lakhs.

Answer 3: Around 1 crore.

We have only an estimate of the number of TB patients who die each year in India, and this is, according to scientists and World Health Organization, 4.5 lakhs.

Question number 6: How can I get tuberculosis?

Answer 1: By using the same toilet as a person with TB.

Answer 2: When a mosquito bites me that has bitten a tuberculosis patient before.

Answer 3: When I breath in the air of a room, in that a tuberculosis patient has coughed.

There is no infection with TB when using the same toilet as a TB patient, or by being bitten by a mosquito.

Infection with TB germs happens, when a person breathes in the air of a room in that a patient with infectious type of lung TB has coughed in before. When a TB patient has coughed, some germs will float in the air around the patient.

These germs are too small to be visible and they don't fall to the ground immediately because they have nearly no weight.

Question number 7: Which symptoms do patients with tuberculosis of their lungs have?

Answer 1: Throat pain, running nose and sticky eyes.

Answer 2: Cough, fever, and no appetite.

Answer 3: Dark urine and yellow eyes.

Tuberculosis can produce a wide variety of symptoms, but in most people, tuberculosis affects the lungs and leads to cough, fever, and loss of appetite. Throat pain, running nose, sticky eyes, dark urine or jaundice are not typical symptoms of TB.

Question number 8: Can a person have tuberculosis anywhere else in the body than in the lungs?

Answer 1: No, tuberculosis affects only the lungs of a person and creates cough over there but doesn't affect any other part of the body.

Answer 2: Yes, tuberculosis can, for example, create swellings at the neck that look like small balls or like grapes, that lie in one line or in a group. These swellings, or nodes, grow slowly within some weeks.

Answer 3: Yes, tuberculosis can, for example, affect the hair of a human being, or his fingernails, and hair will fall out and nails become black.

Tuberculosis can affect every part and every organ of our body with the exemption of hairs and fingernails. Tuberculosis affects most often the lungs and creates cough, but there are other types of TB. Tuberculosis can affect, for example, the abdomen or the bones. Tuberculosis quite frequently leads to swellings, this means: nodes, at the neck, that grow slowly and look like small balls or a bunch of grapes lying in a line or in a cluster. These nodes are usually not very painful, but if they are not treated, they start to secrete pus through fistulas on the surface of the skin.

Question number 9: What can a person do, when such nodes in the neck appear, that grow slowly without being very painful?

Answer 1: Something like that needs an operation, and if a person doesn't want an operation, he can take pain killers and wait and see, whether the nodes go away by themselves.

Answer 2: Such a person should go to a government hospital or big government health center and ask for the TB doctor over there. This doctor will guide the person the way.

Answer 3: "Mumps" pain relief patches are very helpful against nodes in the neck.

If nodes turn up in the neck, several diseases can be behind of it. No doctor can say immediately, what the reason for the swellings in an individual person is. Some tests need to be done. A TB doctor of a government health facility can guide the patient the way. Usually, tests are not expensive over there.

If it is a TB, these nodes will not go away by themselves but will continue to grow until tuberculosis treatment is started. Mumps patches do not help against nodes that are caused by tuberculosis. To rely on such patches is only waste of time.

Question number 10: When should I do a test for tuberculosis?

Answer 1: When I have a cough for two weeks and longer than two weeks.

Answer 2: When I feel dizzy and weak and cannot sleep.

Answer 3: When I have low back pain and tingling in the feet.

Sometimes, TB can lead to weakness or to low back pain, but most TB patients report long time-cough. Test needs to be done when a person has cough for more than two weeks. Teste need to be done if a person has cough for more than two weeks.

Question number 11: Is there any other disease that can make people cough for long time?

Answer 1: If a person coughs for long time, it is surely TB and no other disease.

Answer 2: In persons who smoke, cough is caused by smoking, not from TB. No need to do TB-test.

Answer 3: There are many other diseases that make people cough for long time. All persons who cough for long time must be examined carefully to understand which disease they have.

If a patient tells a doctor that he has cough for long time, no doctor can say immediately from which disease the patient suffers. There are many diseases that make people cough for long time, and it needs proper investigation to find out from which disease a patient suffers.

Question number 12: What do I have to do if I have cough for two weeks and longer than two weeks?

Answer 1: I will go to a government health centre or hospital and give a sample of sputum over there.

Answer 2: I will stay at home and wait until the cough is better. I will not eat fruits in this time.

Answer 3: I know some homoeopathic medicine that is very good against cough.

To stay at home and wait will not solve a problem. If TB is suspected, homoeopathic medicine will not help.

In a sample of sputum (this is the mucus that comes up in our airways when we cough), TB germs can be seen under the microscope. A microscope is some kind of magnification glass. If TB germs are seen in a sputum sample with the help of a microscope, it is proven that this person suffers from tuberculosis. If no TB germs are seen in a sputum sample, this is a valuable information for the doctor, too. He can think of other diseases creating the cough.

Question number 13: If my child has cough for 2 weeks and more, what will I do?

Answer 1: It will become better by itself after some time, and child should not eat fruits for the time being.

Answer 2: I go to next pharmacy and buy a cough syrup for my child. As long as my child is playful, there is no need for any other action.

Answer 3: I go to a Government hospital OPD and tell the doctor, if one of our family members has had TB recently or if my child loses weight.

Around 10% of TB-patients in India are children, and it must be kept in mind, that a long-lasting cough in a child can be caused by tuberculosis. TB in a child is more likely if one of the parents had infectious lung TB in the lifetime of this child. Weight loss of a child, or lack of weight gain, along with long-lasting cough, should arise suspicion of tuberculosis in a child.

Question number 14: Is it really necessary to give a sputum sample after only 2 weeks of cough? I don't know anyone who does that. Most people just wait until cough subsides by itself.

Answer 1: I will go for sputum examination if the cough lasts for more than six weeks.

Answer 2: If I give my sputum sample quickly, means after 2 weeks of cough, it can be very helpful. If I have TB, I will start treatment quickly, before big parts of my lungs are damaged and before I infect my family members.

Answer 3: As long as there is no fever and as long as there is no blood in the sputum, there is no need to give sputum sample.

It is better not to wait any longer when a cough lasts already for two weeks and more. If it is TB, a quick diagnosis and treatment start will help the patient and his family members. If it is not TB, patient can relax and doctor can give him other medicine.

Question number 15: I am living in Forshore Road / Belilious Road area. Where will I go to get a sputum test for TB done?

Answer 1: I have to go to Medical College.

Answer 2: I have to go to Howrah Hospital TB centre.

Answer 3: I can give my sputum for examination in any laboratory in G.T. Road / Belilious Road.

Your next sputum microscopy centre where your sputum sample will be examined is in Howrah Hospital, and you can ask for the TB centre over there. Sputum examination in Government centres is under strict quality supervision and is of better quality than in many laboratories of the commercial sector.

Question number 16: How expensive is the sputum test in Government hospital or health centre?

Answer 1: 200,- Rs. for adults, and 100,- Rs. for children.

Answer 2: It is free of charge.

Answer 3: It is free for people with BPL card, the others have to pay 200,- Rs.

Sputum examination by microscopy is free of charge in all Government health centres or Government hospital OPDs all over India and for everyone. However, they may ask for your Adhaar card.

Question number 17: If the doctor to whom I go for my cough tells me to get a chest X-Ray done, where will I get it?

Answer 1: I can get it done in any diagnostic centre in G.T. Road / Belilious Road and it will cost around 400 Rs.

Answer 2: I can ask the Doctor in Howrah Hospital whether I can get it done over there free of charge.

Answer 3: I can just wait and see whether my cough goes away by itself.

Patients who cough for long time and in whom, besides sputum microscopy, Chest X-Ray is needed, can get it done free of charge in any Government hospital OPD if they ask for.

Question number 18: If I have TB, how long will I have to take medicine?

Answer 1: Around 10 days.

Answer 2: Most patients must take six months treatment, some up to one and a half year.

Answer 3: It is a lifelong treatment.

TB treatment lasts minimum six months. It is not easy to kill all TB germs. That is why it takes so much time.

Some patients must take treatment for up to one and a half years.

Some TB patients are infected with a very strong type of TB germs, that is called drug resistant, and they need more antibiotics and longer time of treatment. Other patients are infected with a bit weaker type of TB germs, that is called drug sensitive, and they need smaller number of antibiotics, and for less time.

There are tests that can clarify whether a patient has a stronger or a weaker TB germ in his lungs.

Question number 19: What will the TB medicine cost?

Answer 1: It is free of charge from Government.

Answer 2: BPL card holders get treatment free of charge, others at rate of 200 Rs. per month.

Answer 3: Tablets are free of charge, but for injections I must pay the compounder (20 Rs. per injection).

TB drugs are free of charge for everyone in all big Government health centres and Government hospital OPDs all over India. However, they may ask for Adhaar card of the patient.

There is no need to waste money for TB drugs or sputum tests in the private medical sector. And patients, who need injections, can get them done free of charge in any Government TB centre.

Question number 20: Can I get tuberculosis treatment from a local doctor, too?

Answer 1: Yes, local doctors prescribe better medicine than Government.

Answer 2: Yes, but medicine is not better, and treatment is expensive and not so careful.

Answer 3: I can try with local doctor. Only if I do not become better, I can go to a Government hospital.

Nobody will stop you if you want to take TB treatment from a local doctor. But usually, patients who use services of the Government TB programme, do better than patients who get treated in chambers of local doctors. In the Government sector, there are more careful tests done for all TB patients, and their staff will solve problems for you if you have difficulties to take your treatment regularly. Government and NGO TB staff will even come to your house and ask how you are doing. No local doctor would do that.

Question number 21: Are the drugs used by Government of good quality?

Answer 1: No, it is better to buy drugs prescribed by a local doctor.

Answer 2: The Government drugs have to be kept in a fridge. If I do not have a fridge, I can ask a neighbour to use his fridge.

Answer 3: Lakhs and lakhs of TB patients have been cured with Government medicine. The medicine will help you, too.

Lakhs and lakhs of TB patients have been cured all over India with the drugs of the Government, and you can trust that this is good medicine. Our NGO uses this medicine successfully for 20 years, and we see, that patient's health improves nicely with this medicine

Question number 22: Are there strong side effects of TB medicine?

Answer 1: Around 5 % to 10% of patients have vomiting in the first one or two weeks of the medicine, but this subsides by itself, or with the use of medicine against vomiting.

Answer 2: Around 25% of patients stop their TB treatment due to severe side effects.

Answer 3: Skin itching is the most disturbing side effect, and it needs a special ointment.

Some patients report vomiting in the first one or two weeks of treatment or feel like vomiting. This subsides by itself once the body of the patient has adjusted to these drugs. If vomiting does not stop, the TB doctor who cares for the TB patients will help with some medicine.

Question number 23: Who gets TB?

Answer 1: Everybody can get TB, but people living in congested rooms and people who have some weakness, for example due to poor nutrition, have highest risk.

Answer 2: People who drink alcohol and smoke fall ill with TB. Other persons get TB only rarely.

Answer 3: More women than men are affected by tuberculosis.

Everybody can get TB. TB affects more men than women. Persons with chronic alcohol use and smokers have a bit higher risk to fall ill with TB. But most important is whether living conditions are congested. When too many persons live in a small room, or work in congested workshops and factories, TB germs can easily spread from one person to another one.

Question number 24: What can I do to protect myself from TB?

Answer 1: Avoid drinking alcohol.

Answer 2: Do not eat too many fruits.

Answer 3: Send any family member who coughs for two weeks and longer than two weeks to TB test.

Occasional alcohol consumption does not confer a high risk of falling sick with TB. Consumption of fruits is not connected to cough or TB disease. Fruits are rich in vitamins and may be even protective against infectious diseases in general. As a head of a family, one has to be strict that any family member who coughs for two weeks and more has to go for sputum test. Only in this way one can stop TB before it harms the family more than unavoidable.

Question number 25: If I have infectious lung tuberculosis, will my family be examined, too?

Answer 1: Yes, the police will come and check Adhaar cards of all family members.

Answer 2: If I have infectious TB, all other household members will be asked whether they have cough, and small children will be checked by X-Ray.

Answer 3: Nobody will come to my house and ask any questions about my family members.

Only family members of persons who fall sick with *infectious* type of TB will be asked about cough. There are many types of TB that are not infectious, and in this situation, family usually doesn't get checked.

If one family member has infectious type of TB, all other family members will be asked about cough, and any coughing person should go for testing. Any person in the household of a patient with infectious lung tuberculosis, who has cough, may have TB, too. This needs to be examined timely by sputum test and Chest X-Ray.

Children below the age of five years, who live in a household with a person with infectious type of TB, need to be examined very carefully and will go for Chest X-Ray and another test, even if they don't have cough.

This all is for the safety of your family.

Question number 26: Is there any hope to get cured from TB?

Answer 1: TB treatment is a lifelong treatment, and most patients will eventually die from tuberculosis after some years.

Answer 2: Around 50% of tuberculosis patients will be cured with the medicine that is available in shops, but not with the medicine of the Government.

Answer 3: Around 80% to 85% of patients get cured from TB if they take their medicine from Government health facilities regularly.

Around 82% of the TB patients of Howrah South Point and the St. Thomas' Home get cured. Cured means that nearly all TB germs in the body of the TB patient are killed and most patients will not experience a relapse of TB in their lifetime. Government TB centres have same cure rate of 80% to 85% like our institution.

Question number 27: If 80% to 85% of patients get cured from TB, why there are so many deaths of tuberculosis (4.5 lakhs per year)?

Answer 1: Government only says that it's medicine is good. In reality, it is counterfeit medicine.

Answer 2: There are too many persons who stop their treatment early, before the stipulated time of 6 - 18 months, and this creates resistant germs.

Answer 3: Any person who drinks alcohol can never be cured from TB, even if he takes his medicine regularly.

Persons who drink alcohol regularly can be cured like others if they take their medicine regularly. And Government medicine is of good quality.

There is a problem with patients who do not undergo systematic diagnostics and treatment. For example, there may be no good doctor available for them, or they have already shortness of breath and cannot walk to a hospital anymore, or they are homeless or don't have an Adhaar card. Migrant workers often stop their treatment before the stipulated time or don't take it regularly. Irregular intake of antitubercular drugs make the TB germs even stronger instead of killing them. In these persons, TB treatment may fail, and patients may finally die from TB disease.

Question 28: Can TB come a second time in life?

Answer 1: TB can relapse, but risk for relapse is low if the previous treatment has been taken completely and exactly.

Answer 2: Treatment of tuberculosis is lifelong, so no need to speak about first and second TB.

Answer 3: People who stop their smoking and alcohol intake will not fall sick with TB anymore.

TB treatment is not lifelong but lasts six months in the most patients. To stop smoking and alcohol is good for the general health of a person, but even in persons without cigarette and alcohol use, disease can relapse.

Persons, who have interrupted a running TB treatment before the stipulated time or have taken their drugs irregularly have a higher risk to get relapse in future in comparison with TB patients who haven't interrupted their treatment in before and have taken it regularly.

Question 29: If I have infectious TB, what can I do to protect my family members?

Answer 1: I should stay under a mosquito net day and night.

Answer 2: I should go to a village where there is fresh air and not so much dust.

Answer3: I should wear a face mask in the first weeks of treatment, keep windows of my room wide open and take medicine regularly.

Going to a village or staying under a mosquito net does not protect other persons from infection with tuberculosis. Persons who have infectious lung TB should wear a face mask when staying with others and should keep the windows of the room open to wash out the germs floating in the air, by air circulation. Patients with infectious type of TB shall turn away from others when they cough, shall not spit in the public and wash their hands regularly.

Question 30: Can I work if I have tuberculosis?

Answer 1: No, TB-patients should keep strict bedrest.

Answer 2: It depends on how you are feeling and whether you are infectious for others in the same factory or not.

Answer 3: After intake of the TB medicine, people have so much vomiting that no one can work.

Only very few TB patients need bedrest, and there is not much vomiting on treatment of tuberculosis. TB patients who have fever, pain, shortness of breath or much weight loss should not go for work.

If a person has infectious lung TB, he should not stay with others in a congested workshop or poorly ventilated factory or lorry.

Question number 31: When my neighbours hear that I have infectious type of TB they will try to expel me from my settlement. What can I answer to them?

Answer 1: I can go to a relative's house for the time being, where nobody knows that I have TB.

Answer 2: It is better to take treatment from a local doctor, because then I can hide the diagnosis and treatment, while in a public TB centre, I will be seen and people will speak bad about me.

Answer 3: I will tell the neighbours that the doctor said, if you wear a face mask for the first weeks of treatment, take your medicine regularly and do not spit on the ground, there is no risk for others.

Going to a different house doesn't help much. When taking treatment from a local doctor, one may be able to hide the disease, but even that doesn't work always. Any diagnostics and treatment by a local doctor is usually less systematic than that in Government centres.

When few rules are followed, members of a neighbour family are safe. There is no need for the fear to get infected by a person with TB in the neighbouring household. You may ask our field workers to speak with your neighbours and explain them if you face troubles.

Question number 32: If my neighbours create problems because they are afraid of me and my TB, what can I answer them?

Answer 1: If they do not keep quiet, I will cough in their direction.

Answer 2: I tell them that there is no risk when using same toilet as me, and there is no need for me to stay under a mosquito net.

Answer 3: For a woman with TB, it is best if she goes to her parents' house as long as she is on TB treatment.

For a neighbour family there is no risk to be infected by TB. TB is not transmitted by using the same toilet as the TB patient, and TB is not transmitted by mosquitoes.

A patient with infectious type of TB is asked to take his medicine regularly, wear a face mask for few weeks, and keep the windows of the room open. A TB-patient shall not spit in public and turn away from others when he coughs.

Do not put any additional pressure on a woman with infectious type of tuberculosis by expelling her from her house. Try to help your relative and neighbour in this situation.

Question number 33: I am migrant worker and do not stay for long time in Howrah. How could my TB treatment be organized?

Answer 1: One can get TB treatment only at the place that is noted in the Adhaar card.

Answer 2: If I speak with TB staff, they will help me to transfer my treatment to any other location where I have to go.

Answer 3: I can take one part of the treatment in Howrah, and when I go anywhere else, I can do the remaining part of the treatment from a local doctor at my new place.

If you plan to move to a different place, our TB staff can organize a seamless continuation of your treatment close by to your new address. But it is a problem to leave Howrah without any notice to your TB staff in advance. Please provide an information of your journey to our staff a few days before you move house.

Question number 34: Is there any social help from the Government for TB patients?

Answer 1: Yes, every TB patient has the right to get 500, - Rupees per month of treatment, but on bank account, not in cash.

Answer 2: With a ration card, TB patients get free food for six months.

Answer 3: Government does not give TB patients any social help.

Every TB patient has the right to get 500,- Rs. per month of treatment from Government, but in reality, it is paid irregularly. Please ask our field workers to help you. You need to have a bank account to receive this money.

Question number 35: If I or any of my relatives has problems with TB or with long lasting cough, who will help me?

Answer 1: Staff of this organization is always ready to help you.

Answer 2: You can go to Howrah Hospital, but when they see that you have taken TB treatment from a local doctor so far, they will not help you.

Answer 3: Only when you have stopped smoking and alcohol, our staff will be ready to help you.

You will get help regarding treatment of a tuberculosis from our organisation and also in Government health centres. Even if you smoke or drink alcohol you will get help. You will get help even if you have taken antitubercular treatment before in your life and if you have stopped this treatment earlier than allowed.

You can discuss any TB-related problem with our staff, and you can see one of our doctors regarding long time cough any day.