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OVERVIEW OF PULMONARY TUBERCULOSIS (TB)

Tharwat Abdullah Almanasef[1*], Ola Abbas Alqudaihi[1], Mehad Ali Alawad[2], Faiza Jaafer Alhaider[2]

[1*] Primary health care National Guard - Dammam
[2] Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal Hospital National Guard Dammam

***Corresponding Author:** Tharwat Abdullah Almanasef
[*] Primary health care National Guard - Dammam

Abstract:
Background: Pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) remains a significant global health challenge, with various regions experiencing different patterns and challenges related to the disease. It affects millions worldwide despite the availability of effective treatments. The disease, caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis, poses a particular risk to healthcare workers and is complicated by issues such as drug resistance and the need for effective diagnostic and treatment strategies. The following sections explore the epidemiology, diagnosis, treatment, and occupational risks associated with pulmonary TB.
Aim: This is an overview of the pulmonary TB etiology and transmission, as well as clinical manifestations and management strategies.
Method: This is a comprehensive review using PUBMED and Google Scholar search engines, which were the main databases used for the search process, with articles collected up to 2012. This thorough review ensures that the information presented is reliable.
Conclusion: The etiology of pulmonary tuberculosis primary pathogen Mycobacterium tuberculosis, the dynamics of transmission, the impact of co-infections like HIV, and the challenges posed by drug resistance. Addressing these factors is critical for effective TB control and prevention strategies worldwide. it presents with a range of respiratory symptoms such as cough and breathlessness, as well as systemic issues like fever and weight loss, making early recognition vital for effective treatment, especially in immunocompromised individuals. Diagnosis involves various methods, including sputum tests and advanced techniques, while effective management requires a comprehensive strategy that encompasses appropriate chemotherapy and adherence to treatment protocols to improve outcomes and control the disease's spread.

Keywords: Tuberculosis – Etiology – Manifestations – Transmission – Diagnosis – Treatment

Introduction:

TB is an ancient disease that has significantly impacted human populations for over 20,000 years, with evidence of its existence documented in various historical contexts. The causative agent, Mycobacterium tuberculosis, was identified in 1882 by Robert Koch, marking a pivotal moment in understanding this disease, which was historically referred to as "consumption" due to its debilitating effects on the lungs. (1) Archaeological findings have revealed lesions indicative of tuberculosis in the remains of Neolithic man, dating back to around 5000 BC, and in Egyptian mummies from approximately 3700 BC. (2) In 2009, there were approximately 9.4 million new incident cases of TB

worldwide, translating to a rate of 137 cases per 100,000 population, alongside 14 million prevalent cases, which underscores the ongoing burden of the disease. (3) The mortality impact is also severe, with an estimated 1.3 million deaths among HIV-negative individuals and 0.38 million among those living with HIV. Notably, the demographic distribution of TB cases shows a concerning trend: while the number of patients under 79 years old has decreased, those over 80 years old represent over half of the new registered cases. This demographic shift highlights the need for targeted interventions for older populations. A critical aspect of TB epidemiology is the prevalence of pulmonary tuberculosis, which accounts for about 80% of all TB cases. This statistic is vital for understanding the most common form of the disease and its transmission dynamics. Furthermore, the emergence of drug-resistant TB poses a significant challenge, with a drug-resistance rate of 13.0% and a multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) rate of 0.8% reported globally.(3) These figures indicate the complexity of treatment and control strategies necessary to combat TB effectively. The burden of TB is also quantified through disability adjusted life years (DALYs), which measure the overall impact of the disease on health. In 1990, TB accounted for 3.4% of all DALYs lost globally, with even higher rates in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, where it reached 4.7%. (4) This metric emphasizes the extensive morbidity associated with TB, reinforcing its status as a leading cause of mortality from infectious diseases. In summary, the epidemiology of tuberculosis is characterized by high incidence and prevalence rates, significant mortality, and the challenges posed by drug resistance. Continued efforts by organizations like the WHO are essential to address this persistent global health issue.

Etiology and Transmission:

The etiology of TB is primarily attributed to the bacterium Mycobacterium tuberculosis, which is the specific pathogen responsible for the disease. This slender, acid-fast aerobic organism is predominantly transmitted through inhalation, making patients with active pulmonary tuberculosis the major source of infection.(5, 6) The disease manifests most commonly in the lungs, where the tubercle bacillus first establishes infection. (7) Several factors complicate the etiology of tuberculosis, notably the co-infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). HIV significantly increases the risk of developing TB, with individuals infected with HIV having a relative risk of 30-170 times higher for reactivation of tuberculosis compared to those without HIV. (8) This relationship underscores the critical role of immunocompromised states in the resurgence of TB, particularly in regions where both infections are prevalent. (6)

Socioeconomic factors also play a significant role in the etiology of tuberculosis. Conditions such as crowding, homelessness, and poor nutrition contribute to the spread and severity of the disease. These factors create environments conducive to transmission and increase the vulnerability of populations to TB infection. The World Health Organization (WHO) has highlighted the resurgence of tuberculosis in industrialized nations, linking it to these socioeconomic determinants. (9) Moreover, the emergence of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) presents additional challenges to TB management and control. MDR-TB is resistant to at least two of the most potent anti-TB drugs, complicating treatment options and increasing the risk of transmission. (6) The understanding of TB latency, where the bacterium can remain dormant in a nonreplicating state, further complicates the disease's etiology, affecting a significant portion of the global population. (6)

Clinical Manifestations:

pulmonary TB presents with a range of clinical manifestations that can vary significantly, particularly in immunocompromised individuals such as those co-infected with HIV. Key symptoms include cough, breathlessness, and systemic manifestations like fever and weight loss. Cough is one of the most prevalent symptoms, reported in approximately 80% of patients with pulmonary TB, making it a critical clinical indicator of the disease. (10) This cough can be chronic, defined as lasting more than three weeks, and is often associated with the expectoration of sputum, particularly in the mornings. (11) In fact, expectoration is observed in about 64.1% of immunocompromised patients, highlighting the importance of recognizing this symptom for accurate diagnosis. (12) Breathlessness

is another significant manifestation, reported in 60% of patients, and can indicate the severity of pulmonary involvement. (10) The presence of chest pain may also occur, often resulting from lung damage or pleural effusion associated with TB. Systemic symptoms are equally important in the clinical picture of pulmonary TB. Fever is a common systemic response to infection, and its presence can indicate the body's immune response to the Mycobacterium tuberculosis. (13) Alongside fever, weight loss is frequently observed, often attributed to the increased metabolic demands during infection and the anorexia that TB can induce. (13) Night sweats are another notable symptom, frequently reported in TB patients, which can disrupt sleep and contribute to overall fatigue. **(14)**

Diagnosis and Laboratory Testing:

The diagnosis of pulmonary TB relies on a combination of laboratory testing methods, each with its strengths and limitations. Sputum microscopy, particularly through acid-fast bacilli (AFB) microscopy, is a fundamental diagnostic tool that helps identify smear-positive cases of pulmonary TB. This method involves staining sputum samples to visualize acid-fast organisms, which appear red under specific staining procedures such as Ziehl-Neelsen or Kinyoun methods. (15) However, while sputum microscopy is crucial, it is less effective for diagnosing smear-negative cases and extrapulmonary TB, highlighting the need for additional diagnostic approaches. (15) Culture for Mycobacterium tuberculosis remains the gold standard for confirming TB diagnosis. Sputum cultures, particularly using the modified Petroff's method, allow for the growth and identification of M. tuberculosis from clinical specimens, providing high sensitivity and specificity. (15) In practice, studies have shown that two consecutive cultures can detect a significant majority of culture-positive cases, emphasizing the importance of this method in clinical settings. (16) In recent years, nucleic acid amplification tests (NAA tests) have emerged as a rapid and accurate alternative for diagnosing pulmonary TB. These tests, including the widely used polymerase chain reaction (PCR), amplify specific nucleic acid regions unique to M. tuberculosis, allowing for quicker diagnosis compared to traditional methods. (17) The introduction of commercial NAA tests, such as the Amplicor MTB test and the Amplified Mycobacterium tuberculosis Direct Test (MTD), has been a significant advancement in TB diagnostics, providing clinicians with tools for timely intervention. Despite the advantages of NAA tests, it is essential to consider their cost and accessibility, as they can vary significantly, impacting their widespread use in resource-limited settings. Therefore, while traditional methods like sputum microscopy and culture remain vital, integrating NAA tests into diagnostic protocols can enhance the overall accuracy and speed of TB diagnosis.

Treatment and Management:

The treatment and management have evolved significantly, focusing on effective chemotherapeutic strategies and adherence to treatment protocols. The primary approach involves antituberculosis chemotherapy, which utilizes specific medications to combat the infection and prevent its spread. The standard initial treatment regimen for drug-susceptible TB typically includes a combination of isoniazid, rifampin, pyrazinamide, and ethambutol, collectively known as the First-Line Treatment Regimen. A critical aspect of managing TB is the implementation of a primary regimen, which is initiated while awaiting drug sensitivity results. This regimen is maintained for at least eight weeks, ensuring that patients receive treatment with drugs likely to be effective against the infection. (18, 19) The timely initiation of treatment is essential, as it can prevent unnecessary surgical interventions in cases where TB presents to surgeons. To enhance treatment efficacy and prevent the emergence of drug resistance, combined drug treatment is employed. This method involves administering multiple anti-tuberculosis drugs simultaneously, which has proven successful in managing the disease and curbing resistance. (20) The rationale behind this approach is that each drug targets different bacterial populations, thereby increasing the likelihood of eradicating the infection. (20) In addition to pharmacological interventions, chemoprophylaxis plays a vital role in TB management. This preventive strategy aims to reduce the size of the infected pool at risk of developing TB, thereby contributing to the overall decline in incidence rates, particularly in economically developed countries. (18) Modern methods of treatment emphasize the complete elimination of symptoms until

a cure is achieved, allowing patients to return to their normal lives. (21) Directly Observed Therapy (DOT) is a recommended strategy that ensures adherence to treatment by having healthcare providers observe patients taking their medications. This approach has been shown to significantly improve treatment completion rates, especially among those at risk for poor adherence. (22)

Conclusion:

The etiology of pulmonary tuberculosis primary pathogen Mycobacterium tuberculosis, the dynamics of transmission, the impact of co-infections like HIV, and the challenges posed by drug resistance. Addressing these factors is critical for effective TB control and prevention strategies worldwide. it presents with a range of respiratory symptoms such as cough and breathlessness, as well as systemic issues like fever and weight loss, making early recognition vital for effective treatment, especially in immunocompromised individuals. Diagnosis involves various methods, including sputum tests and advanced techniques, while effective management requires a comprehensive strategy that encompasses appropriate chemotherapy and adherence to treatment protocols to improve outcomes and control the disease's spread.

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