

Evaluation of a Tuberculosis Surveillance System in the Harare City Health Department in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Aims: To evaluate a tuberculosis surveillance system (TBSS) in Harare.

Study design: Descriptive cross-sectional study.

Place and Duration of Study: Harare City Health Department, Zimbabwe, between January 2013 to September 2013.

Methodology: Standard CDC surveillance evaluation guidelines were employed to assess the performance of TBSS in the Harare City. Health care officers involved in TB surveillance were recruited. Data were collected using a questionnaire and analysed.

Results: Respondents were knowledgeable about the TBSS, with 93% being aware of the TB screening test and 18% knowledgeable of all the five standard questions used in TB screening, while 53% knew about 4 of them. Only 22% could state all the seven clinical case definitions of TB. However 60% were not aware of the objectives of the TBSS. About 64% indicated that they had analysed TB data and 69 % indicated that the TBSS was useful. On simplicity, the majority (95%) of the respondents indicated that it was easy to use the case definitions used in TB classification of patients. The TBSS was acceptable to 100% of the respondents. On flexibility, 76% of the respondents showed that the TB notification form could accommodate additional diseases and 75% indicated that other health conditions be included.

Conclusion: The study concluded that the TBSS within the Harare City Health department was simple, flexible, stable, representative and acceptable to the health care workers and data completeness was commendable. The surveillance system addressed the TB control priorities and effectively monitored the disease in the City.

Keywords: Tuberculosis, surveillance, Harare, Zimbabwe

1. INTRODUCTION

Tuberculosis (TB) has remained one of the world's deadliest communicable diseases and the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a global public health emergency [1]. More than 95% of new cases and deaths due to TB occur in low and middle income countries with

28 25% cases reported in the African region [2,3]. In Zimbabwe and many other Sub-Saharan
29 African countries, TB continues to be a significant cause of morbidity and mortality where
30 case fatality rate exceeds 50% due to HIV/AIDS coinfection [4]. In 2010, Zimbabwe was
31 ranked 17th of the 22 TB high-burdened countries that together account for approximately
32 8% of all new TB cases arising each year in the world [5].

33 One of the reasons why progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the
34 Stop TB Partnership, which aimed to significantly reduce the burden of TB by 2015, has
35 been slow probably due to poor surveillance of the disease in developing countries. In order
36 to measure the progress towards these targets and to evaluate the impact of TB control
37 programmes, routine monitoring of TB incidence, prevalence and mortality rates through
38 case notification and evaluation of treatment outcomes, routine surveillance data is required
39 [6]. Therefore, public health surveillance is a critical component of successful TB control as it
40 provides essential information needed to identify sentinel events, such as potential
41 outbreaks, recent transmission, multi-drug resistance and deaths, establish priorities for
42 control and prevention activities, and strategically plan use of limited resources as well as
43 identifying strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations [7]. Evaluation is also a
44 very important tool for policy makers in measuring the performance of the health program
45 and in this case, to determine whether TB is monitored efficiently and effectively [8,9].
46 According to the World Health Organization protocol for disease surveillance and response
47 systems, a well-functioning disease surveillance system needs to be periodically assessed
48 so that it continues to reflect national disease control priorities, remains efficient and takes
49 advantages of opportunities for the integration of new surveillance methods and techniques
50 that improve the efficiency of the system [10].

51 In Zimbabwe TB surveillance data are collected at local, district, provincial and national
52 levels for the purposes of providing baseline data, goal setting, monitoring program
53 performance, and assessing case detection rates and for the evaluation of TB treatment
54 outcomes. Rural and urban health centers have the role of identification, initiating,
55 supervision and observation of treatment and follow-up of contacts and defaulters. The
56 district and provincial levels are the basic management units for TB control. They are
57 responsible for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of patients, supervision, monitoring of
58 treatment, registration and compilation of reports. Early warning of epidemics is therefore
59 essential for effective and rapid control, while information on endemic communicable
60 disease is essential for monitoring the disease. The main aim of this study was to evaluate a
61 TB surveillance system in Harare City Health department so as to determine whether TB is
62 efficiently and effectively monitored and to assess whether the system addresses TB control
63 priorities.

64 2. METHODOLOGY

66 2.1 Study Design, Population and Sampling

67
68 This was a descriptive cross-sectional evaluation study using the CDC surveillance
69 evaluation guidelines to assess the performance of TB surveillance Harare City Health
70 department [11]. Two categories of the population consisting of human respondents and TB
71 notification forms and outcome treatment reports from January 2013 to September 2013
72 were sampled. Fifty-five health care officers involved in TB surveillance at 11 health facility
73 centres were included in the study. Seventy (1/10) notification forms filled in from January
74 2013 to September 2013 were reviewed. This sample size was based on a similar study in
75 2008 where an evaluation of the TB Surveillance system was conducted in Harare
76 (unpublished data).

Six out of the eight administrative districts of Harare were randomly selected by picking the first 6 districts from a hat. Eleven clinics were randomly selected out of 28 clinics in the 6 districts using the same method. The two TB diagnosing centers, Wilkins and Beatrice Road Infectious Hospitals were purposively included in the study. Health facility TB focal persons available on duty were included in the study. All the officers in the TB surveillance programme at the participating sites were also included in the study. Officers at health centers who were not in the TB surveillance were excluded from the study. One out of every ten notification forms filled in from January 2013 to September 2013 was reviewed. Notification forms filled in before January and after September were excluded from the study.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using an interviewer-administered questionnaire to gather information on the health worker knowledge of the TB surveillance system. A review of 70 TB treatment notification forms and 33 outcome treatment reports for the period January 2013 to September 2013 was also performed mainly to assess data completeness. A checklist developed from CDC updated guidelines for evaluating surveillance systems was used to evaluate the TB surveillance systems attributes according to simplicity, flexibility, timeliness, accessibility, completeness, data quality, stability and availability of resources [11]. To assess the simplicity of the surveillance system, the evaluation assessed the easiness of the application of the TB case definitions, the type and amount of data collected, time taken to complete investigation forms and the easiness of information flow. Epi info version 3.3.2 was used for data entry and analysis. Means, frequencies and proportions were calculated for quantitative data. Information collected on the checklist was analysed manually to extract information on data quality and resources available.

2.3 Ethical Approval and Considerations

The study was carried out in accordance with standard ethical guidelines. Written permission to do the study was sought from and granted by the Director of Harare City Health department. Informed verbal consent was obtained from all the study participants. The study objectives and purpose was explained to the participants individually and the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions. Participants were given a choice on whether to participate in the study or not and their choice was respected. Confidentiality was assured and maintained by not including any identifier information on the questionnaire forms and all forms were secured with limited access to only study personnel throughout the study.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Fifty-five health care workers from Harare City Health Clinics were interviewed between the 21st and 30th of October 2013. Forty-three (78%) were females and fifty (91%) were nurses with different levels of certification. Over 70% of the respondents indicated that they had been in service for more than 10 years, with a median service period of 15 years and had been performing TB surveillance duties for a median period of 4 years. Thirty-six were currently working in the Out-patient Department (OPD) and the Primary Care Clinic (PCC). Over 80% of the respondents indicated that their role in TB surveillance included all of the following roles: diagnosis, notification, treating patients, coordination, updating register, follow-up on patients (Fig. 1).

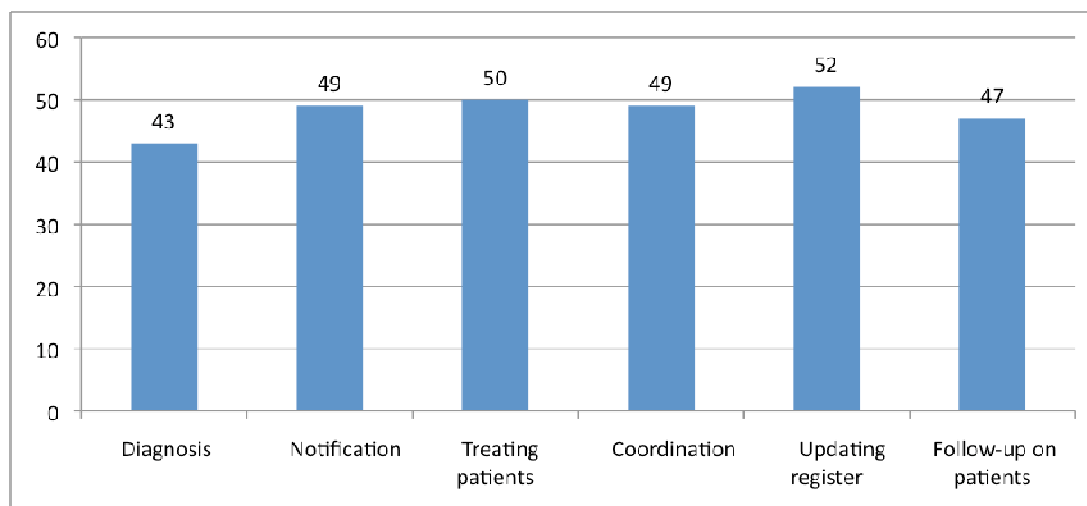


Fig. 1. The distribution of the various roles in TB surveillance by respondents.

3.2 Knowledge of the TB Surveillance System

When asked to specify the five standard questions used in screening TB patients, 10 (18%) managed to specify them all with 29 (53%) managing to specify 4 questions. Although, 51 (93%) knew the test used to screen for TB in children, only 29 (58%) could correctly specify how it is administered. On TB case definitions, 12 (22%) were able to correctly define all the 7 clinical case definitions of TB asked. The majority, 38 (69%) were not able to correctly define Extreme Resistant TB (Fig. 2).

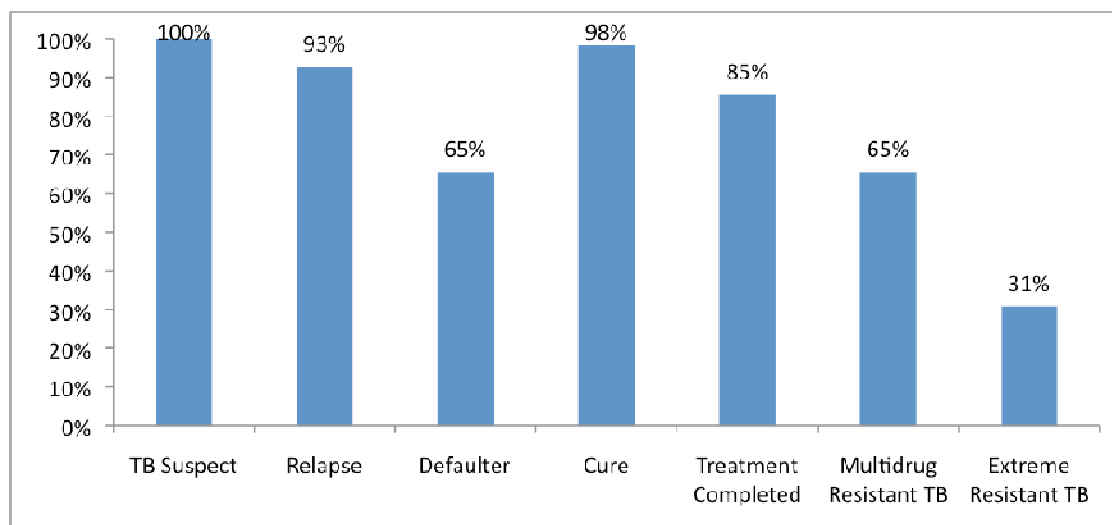
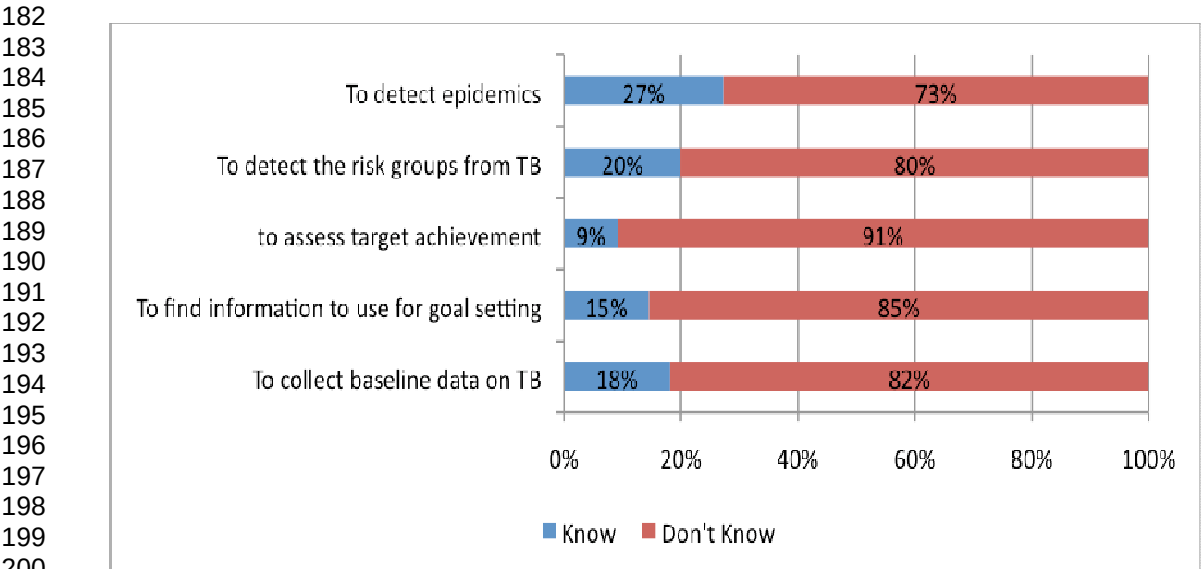


Fig. 2. Correct Clinical Case Definitions by respondents

177 Further questioning on TB showed that 35 (64%) of the respondents were able to correctly
178 specify the steps a TB case will undergo and the forms that need to be completed. The
179 majority of the respondents, 33 (60%) could not specify the objectives of the TB surveillance
180 system (Fig. 3). Less than 30% could specify at least one. However 49 (89%) of the
181 respondents indicated that TB surveillance data that is collected is used at the local level.

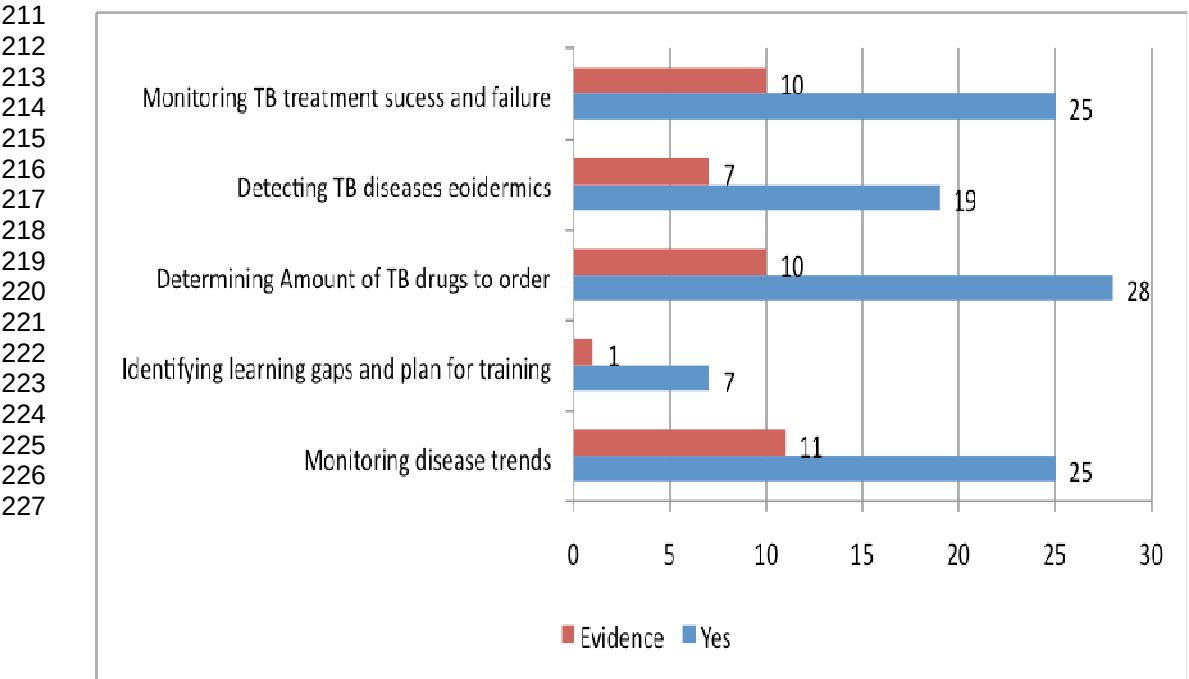


202 **Fig. 3. Knowledge of the objectives of the TB Surveillance System by respondents**

203
204 Nearly 50 % of the respondents indicated that the TB data were used mainly for monitoring
205 disease trends and monitoring TB treatment success and failure.

206 **3.3 Usefulness of the TB Surveillance System**

207
208 Thirty-five (64%) of the respondents indicated that they have analysed TB data and 37 (69
209 %) also indicated that the surveillance system is useful (Fig. 4). However, those who did not
210 think it was useful did not give a reason.



3.4 Simplicity

The majority, 52 (95%) of the respondents indicated that it is easy to use the case definitions in TB classification of patients. Further, 42 (76%) indicated that they had compiled TB disease surveillance data for submission to the next level. Those who had compiled the data also indicated that it took them a median time of 8 hours to extract the data, another 8 hours to compile the report and less than 8 hours to finally submit the data to the next level. However, 31 out of 42 respondents (74 %) who compile data indicated that the compilation process was fairly simple and seven out of 42 (70%) found the process difficult and the main reasons indicated were that registers need to be merged and some information is missing, paper-based system has challenges and time constrains, multiple duties. Eight (15%) indicated that surveillance work takes less than 10 % of their time but for 10 (31%) it takes more than 50%. Further, 45 (82%) indicated that they need special training in TB surveillance in areas like data management, fixed dose drug combinations, MDR, XDR, GeneXpert®, refresher training in TB case management and New M & E tools

3.5 Acceptability

All the respondents indicated that they were willing to continue participating in TB surveillance work. Although 17 (31%) of the respondents indicated that compiling TB data affects their ability to complete other tasks, 35 (64%) indicated that compilation of TB data does not affect other duties.

3.6 Timeliness

During the study, over 60% of the forms and reports were submitted on time (Fig. 5). However, where there were delays because of the following main reasons given for the delay: shortage of staff, transport problems, missing data and heavy work-load.

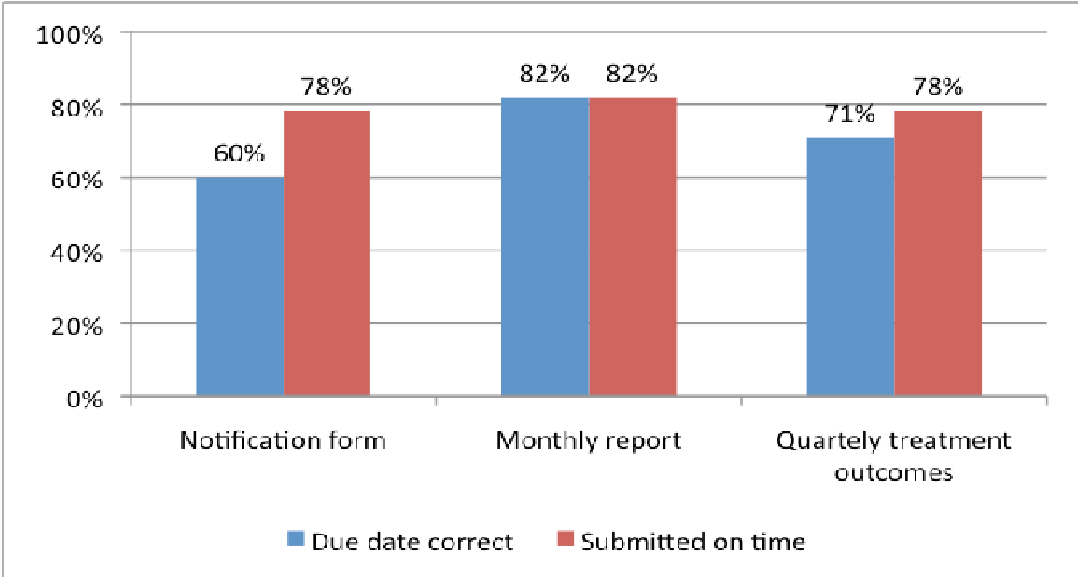


Fig. 5. Submission of forms and reports by respondents

3.7 Flexibility

The majority, 42 (76%) of the respondents felt the TB notification form could accommodate additional health conditions or diseases as it has a column for 'other' already and this would compliment patient management. 41 (75%) of the respondents also indicated that other health conditions need to be included on the TB forms. These would include, (in order of number of times mentioned), Diabetes Mellitus, hypertension, any disease that lowers the immune system (such as HIV), cancers, Kaposi sarcoma, malnutrition, chronic diseases and sexually transmitted infections.

3.8 Feedback

Although 16 (39%) of the respondents indicated that they do not receive feedback, the majority, 38 (69%) indicated that they do receive feedback and 16 out of 38 (42%) received within the last 4 weeks.

3.9 Facility Level assessments

At all the health care centres assessed, 100% of all the forms were mainly completed by the nurses as shown in Table 1 below except for the contact tracing form which was also completed by the EHT at 5 health care centres. Further, it was noted that 90% of data on notification forms was complete and accurate. Of the 11 notification forms evaluated, 7(63.6%) were completed by a nurse, 1(9.1%) were completed by a TB nurse. The rest were either completed by EHT or Clerk. Nine (81.8%) of the transfer forms were completed by a nurse, 1 (9.1%) by a TB nurse and 1(9, 1%) were completed by EHT. Forty-five (45%) TB contact tracing forms were completed by the nurse, 1 (9.1%) were completed by TB nurse and the rest was completed by EHT. Over 70% of both TB monthly and quarterly summaries were completed by a nurse and over 60% of all treatment outcome forms were filled in by a nurse.

Table 1. Pharmacy and Laboratory Department

Drug available	Health Care Centres N=11	Status/Comment
Isoniazid(H) – Yes	10(90.9%)	-
Rifampicin(R) – Yes	11(100%)	-
Ethambutol(E) – Yes	11(100%)	-
Pyrazinamide(Z) – Yes	11(100%)	-
Streptomycin(S) – Yes	11(100%)	-
Lab Reagents- Yes	6(54.5%)	5/11 Health Care Centres have no laboratory
Microscopes- Yes	6(54.5%)	5/11 Health Care Centres have no laboratory
Sputum Jars- Yes	10(90.9%)	-
Drug stock outs in the past year – Yes	6(54.5%)	- Pyrazinamide, INH and Rifa (FDC stock out in August - INH for 3/12 intermittently - Paeds INH and Rifa expired June this

		<i>year for 2 months stock out + FDC Paed (3in1)</i>
		<i>FDC 4 in 1 Erratic supply stocked out for 3 weeks</i> <i>Paeds 3 in 1 stockout for 3 weeks</i>
Reagents stock out in the past year- No	6(54.5%)	<i>5/11 Health Care Centres have no laboratory</i>
Breakdowns in the X-Ray Department in the past year- Yes	1(9.1%)	<i>1/1 – For 1 A day of 2 due to the processing machine failure</i> <i>10/11 Health Care Centres have no X-Ray Department</i>
Staff compliment adequate- No	11(100%)	<i>Need for a statistical Officer and a Radiographer</i> <i>Needs review since clinic caters for the commuters from Mbare bus terminus and workload has increased, now dealing with 3 times more than population of Mbare</i>

307

308 Over 72 % of the health care centres **had** all the required utilities to do their work except a
309 functional fax machine and internet connectivity which was only available at one site.
310 Further, although 6 (**55%**) had transport, 4 out of 6 had no dedicated transport. Ten health
311 care centres were checked on human resources. Over 70% of the posts are filled for all the
312 health care centres. However, 3 out of 10 (30%) health care centres had laboratory posts, of
313 which **were all** filled except one. Health care centres with matron posts were all filled.

314 Nine out of eleven (82%) of the health care centres were sending notification reports on time
315 since January, but one centre only started in June and for the other one, it was not clear
316 whether they were being sent as only 2 months out of 10 months checked could be
317 confirmed . However, sending of outcome reports was not as consistent. Less than 50% of
318 the health care centres sent in outcome reports during the entire 10-month period reviewed.
319 Of the 11 healthcare centres assessed on timeliness of surveillance, 9 (81.8%) sent the TB
320 notification reports on time from January to May and it improved to 90.9% from June to
321 September and then dropped to 54.5% in October. An average of 18.2% of the outcome
322 reports were sent on time from January to May and the increased to 54.5% from June to
323 October.

324 All 11 health care centres **had** all the TB drugs and laboratory reagents (for those with
325 laboratories) and equipment available. However, 6 out of 11 (55%) of the health care centres
326 had drug stock-outs in the past year, but no reagent stock-outs were indicated for health
327 care centres with laboratories. Only one site had an X-ray machine and it broke down just for

one day. All the health care centres indicated that the staff compliment was not adequate and one site indicated that this had been made worse by its proximity to a busy bus terminus where commuters find it easy to seek treatment at the nearest centre following arrival in Mbare.

4. DISCUSSION

Knowledge on the objectives of TBSS was low among the study participants. Most participants however confused the objectives of the TB control programme with those of the surveillance system. Less than 30% could specify at least one. It was noted however that the objectives of the TB surveillance system were not displayed in most of the clinics assessed. Knowledge on TB case definitions was also noted to be low as only 22% were able to correctly define all the seven clinical case definitions of TB asked. The majority (69%) were not able to correctly define XDR TB while 35% were not able to define MDR TB. This is in sync with the sentiments that most respondents reported that they are in need of training in XDR and MDR TB. These findings are in synch with those from a previous study in Harare in 2005 [12]. In that previous study, an evaluation of the TB surveillance system in Harare prisons found that knowledge on the system and flow of data was poor [12]. In another study in Harare in 2007, an evaluation of the TB surveillance in the City Health Department found that less than half of the study participants had knowledge of the TB surveillance objectives [13]. The findings from this evaluation suggested that knowledge on the TB surveillance objectives and flow of data in the Harare City health workers was still low [13]. However all the respondents knew how to define a TB suspect (100%), relapse (93%), cured (98%) and treatment completed (85%) [13]. This may be attributed to the number of years of experience in the TBSS of the study participants which was quite high with a median number of 4 years participating in TB surveillance duties. The high knowledge may also be attributed to the TB Monitoring and Evaluation trainings for health workers conducted in the Harare City Health department.

Although the TBSS was reported useful by all the study participants, little written evidence to support data analysis and use of data at local level was found, suggesting that there may be very little data analysis and use of data for decision making at health facility level. In another study, an evaluation of the TB surveillance system in Mashonaland East found that TB data were not being used for public health action [14]. However, evidence of data analysis found at district level suggested the need for trainings in data analysis to be cascaded down to primary health care facility level. According to the CDC guidelines for evaluating surveillance systems, taking 'action' is what distinguishes a surveillance system from merely data recording [8].

The acknowledgement of the acceptability of the TBSS by the study participants is complemented by the improvements in data completeness observed as well as the timeliness of submission of the 2013 first, second and third quarter outcomes report. Though timeliness of notification once a patient was diagnosed was generally good, the unavailability of a tracking system to check on timeliness of submission of the notification forms, monthly and quarterly reports made it difficult to objectively assess timeliness of submission of reports to the next level. The correct reporting of treatment outcomes improves the quality of the data reported. Correct reporting of treatment outcomes is of paramount importance as it has a bearing on the calculation of the indicators used for monitoring TB Treatment success and failure rates which are key indicators for TB program performance. The majority of the respondents reported TBSS as flexible as it accommodated the reporting of other conditions like HIV and this was also supported by another study [15]. The availability of adequate TB stationery, clear defined roles for operating the TBSS through TB focal persons and TB

378 District coordinators made the TBSS stable. Though internet connectivity in all the clinics
379 save for one was not functioning, its absence does not affect the functioning of the TBSS.

380 The high knowledge in TB screening, TB case definitions and patient registration procedures
381 serves as a reflection of the skill of the health care providers in identifying and reporting
382 cases making the system sensitive in picking up TB cases. However the low knowledge in
383 knowing how the Mantoux test is administered for TB screening in children may indicate that
384 the procedure is either not done in most of the clinics or is done wrongly. This may
385 compromise patient management. According to Review of Childhood TB activities carried
386 out by the National TB Program in 2011, the incidence of new cases of TB in children at 59
387 per 100 000 was much lower compared to adults figures of 782 per 100 000. This may
388 suggest an under-representation of young children or that the disease is less common in
389 children. Through analysis of data recorded by the system, the system is able to detect
390 changes in TB disease patterns and treatment outcomes. An increased number of TB cases
391 notified for 2011 were observed from 2010. According to the CDC guidelines for evaluating
392 Surveillance systems, a sensitive system has the ability to monitor changes in the number of
393 cases over time. Though the system has managed to detect cases of MDR-TB through the
394 use of the GeneXpert® machine, the high proportion (69%) of study participants who were
395 not able to give the correct case definition of XDR-TB may indicate that some cases are
396 being missed. However, knowledge on MDR at 65% was reasonable.

397 The TBSS is representative as it enables the description of TB occurrence over time and its
398 distribution in the residents of Harare by place and person and all the health facilities in the
399 Harare City Health Department are involved in the system and collect data in a uniform way
400 through the use of standardized registers and forms. The lack of consistent feedback from
401 the MOHCC to the HCHD on the performance of the TBSS is a cause for concern which
402 need to be addressed as dissemination of information to those who need to know and use it
403 is of paramount importance in the operation of any surveillance although 42 reported that
404 they last received feedback in the last 4 weeks.

405 In order to improve the TBSS, the respondents suggested that case investigation forms must
406 be completely filled, as well as dedicating staff responsible for TB surveillance. The health
407 workers needed to be equipped with current TB information so that they can maintain high
408 standard of TB surveillance and give quarterly feedback reports. It was also suggested that
409 the surveillance system should improve space for TB management, follow-up for TB case
410 contacts, staff compliment, frequency of training workshops and reliable transport.

411 4. CONCLUSION

412
413 This study concluded that the TBSS within the Harare City Health department simple,
414 flexible, stable, representative, and acceptable to the health care workers and data
415 completeness was commendable. Although the data analyzed within the system was being
416 used to improve the TB program performance, lack of documentation of data analysis at
417 local level made it difficult to ascertain the extent of use of data at local level.

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423
424

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Authors RM, CD, SM designed the study, drafted the study protocols and supervised the research work. All authors analyzed the data and wrote the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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