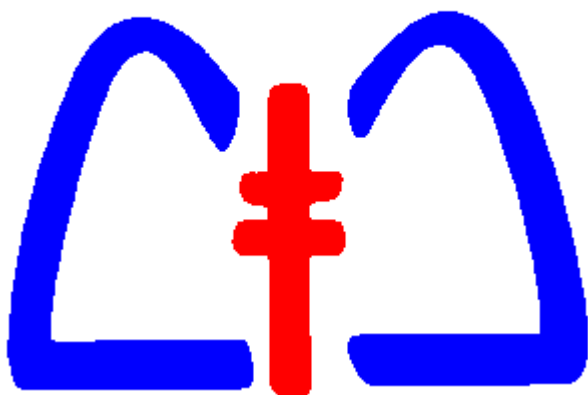


Project Juntos



Since "Project Juntos" is concerned with the control and elimination of tuberculosis (TB) cases in Ciudad Juarez-El Paso-Las Cruces border region, attention to the consorted efforts made by this ten-year program will be the main focus of this week's continuation topic of "U.S. Mexico Border and Tuberculosis". Population growth, worldwide travel and multi-drug resistant TB have contributed to the increase. But most of the growth is due to the impact of HIV. Tuberculosis is one of the main opportunistic infections that kills AIDS sufferers, and people with HIV are more susceptible to TB.

Juntos



A little history about the start of health programs and their initiatives is beneficial to understanding the efforts health officials invest. It takes teamwork, comradeship, and culture sensitivity to incorporate a successful

health project to a proud yet physically, socially, and economically neglected race of individuals.

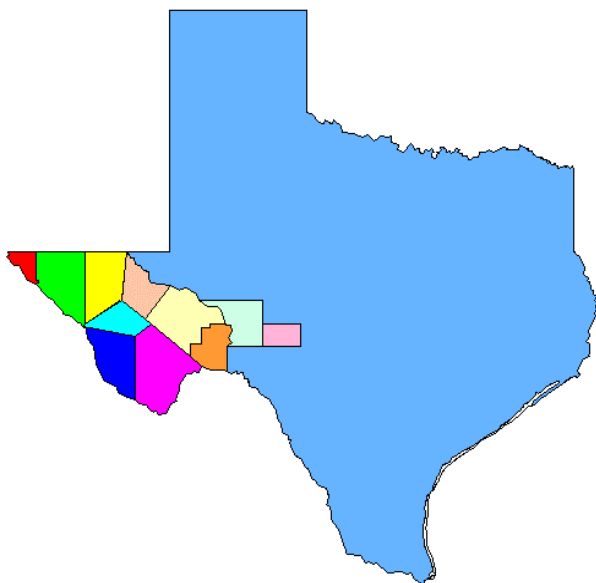
If we take a look back in history, U.S.-Mexico Border health initiatives were developed due to specific communicable disease outbreaks or to the special interests of various local groups. These initiatives, some sponsored by the Federal government, and established during World War II, were generally conducted through the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association (USMBHA). PAHO (Pan American Health Organization) has a field office in El Paso, Texas, and have been involved in the fight against TB on the border. Health officials within the past ten years have focused a great deal of attention on the threat of tuberculosis surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border region. This attention to TB is largely due to the elevated new cases of TB rates and the increased number of drug-resistant TB cases.

As a result, a number of programs have been initiated to reduce incidence and prevalence of TB and other diseases along the border region. One commonality exists among the list of health programs and that is the U.S. and Mexico health officials at all levels (Federal, State, County, and Municipal), agree that common health problems suggest a need for a cohesive bi-national strategic community.

Recent cooperative programs include:

- 1) Ten Against TB, a program involving the ten border states which received recognition

- from the Border Governors at their 1997 Conference in Coahuila;
- 2) Sister Cities Projects, whose objective is to strengthen the capacity of local health departments in developing bi-national health programs. The San Luis Rio Colorado/Yuma project is an example;
 - 3) California/Baja California Tuberculosis Project, developed and administered by San Diego County's Department of Health Services with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; and
 - 4) Project JUNTOS in Ciudad Juarez/El Paso/Las Cruces which draws participation from Mexico and U.S. Federal, State and Municipal levels and the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association.



Border Counties in TDH Region 9/10

Project Juntos, meaning "Project Together", is a bi-national Tuberculosis prevention and control project that began in 1991. The objectives of "Project Juntos" are:

- Identification of new tuberculosis cases
- Support current infrastructure of health services
- Implementation of a bi-national information system
- Develop an efficient communication system and build an electronic bi-national case registry
- Develop an enhanced program for tuberculosis professional training, health promotion and disease prevention

Components and a list of activities provided by "Project Juntos" encompass and facilitate the borderland region extensively to include diagnostic and treatment services through existing local TB control programs (for New Mexico that would be the Public Health Department.) Through these facilities individuals have access to primary and second-line drugs to treat TB. In some cases, when drug therapy has been interrupted for whatever reason, DOT services are provided.

Expert consultation through the Texas Center for Infectious Diseases, South Texas Hospital, and the National Jewish Hospital located in Denver are facilities accessible to the bi-national project. "Project Juntos" not only expedites referrals to Mexican health entities, but inpatient services are available at Hospital General de Ciudad Juarez for TB patients.

"Project Juntos" collects smears and cultures from individuals suspected of, or infected with the Tuberculin bacillus and are sent for identification and drug sensitivity testing to El Paso Health Department, Texas State Laboratory and Las Cruces Public Health Department. While a patient is being

interviewed for their health related history, information is given to the patient about local HIV testing, and chest x-ray services as well.



X-Ray of an Infected Lung

Juntos Bi-national Clinical TB Committee has experts from both sides of the border meeting monthly to review difficult tuberculosis cases, offer expert management advice, facilitate the acquisition of second-line drug therapy, monitoring the use of second-line drug therapy, and advocate the seriousness of the "multi-drug resistant tuberculosis" (MDRTB) problem along the border.

Probably the most important action, aside from providing drug therapy to TB patients of "Project Juntos" is the data analysis and education they conduct in El Paso, Ciudad/Juarez and Las Cruces about Tuberculosis. Collecting

demographic information, patient information (age, sex, occupation, and family status), profiling chronic diseases, contact information and updating the database is an exhausting job.

By far, for the past ten years of "Project Juntos" educational facts about TB has definitely contributed to the statistical decline of patients with tuberculosis. Dr. Miguel Escobedo, the Director of "Project Juntos" in El Paso, Texas says "although morbidity is down concerning tuberculosis, the job is harder". I asked Dr. Escobedo what he meant by the job is harder and his reply was, "when a population begins to think there is little or no risk of contracting tuberculosis, their guard is down and they become relaxed to the threat of disease attacking them, thus creating a harder job for the educator to turn this thinking around".

As an example of educational support by Dr. Miguel Escobedo's statement was the event at "The Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum", in Las Cruces, NM. This year's theme for World TB Day, 24 March 2001 was "DOTS: TB cure for all". The Stop TB Initiative, was launched in November 1998 by Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Director-General of WHO.

If you want to get involved with "Project Juntos" (working together), and contribute your talents and time to the ongoing effort to someday eradicate this disease of old, please contact Dr. Miguel Escobedo, at miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us or Dr. Fernando Gonzalez, at fernando.gonzalez@tdh.state.tx.us in El Paso, and Lynda Alfonso at l Alfonso@nmsu.edu in Las Cruces.

References:

Texas Department of Health, Public Health Region 9/10. Project Juntos.

NJMS National Tuberculosis Center

http://www.iuatld.org/html/online_declaration.htm

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I want to take this time to thank wholeheartedly both Dr. Escobedo and Dr. Gonzalez for your generosity in assisting me with information about "Project Juntos". Thank you.

"Border Voices"

Deborah Jackson-writer

www.nmsu.edu/~bec