

**PRESS RELEASE**

XXV International Conference on Tuberculosis  
Barcelona, 15-16 November 2021

**The COVID-19 pandemic remains getting worse the tuberculosis control**

This Conference organized by the **Tuberculosis Research Unit Foundation of Barcelona (fuiTB)** has reached its 25th edition this year. 37 speakers and 17 moderators have participated, and it gathered 858 health professionals from 23 different countries. The highlights of this conference have been the importance of COVID-19 elimination and taking advantage of the human and technical resources dedicated to this infection to improve the prevention and tuberculosis (TB) control, as it suffers the impact of COVID-19.

**In Public Health**, it is essential to unite all efforts to end this old disease, and it is recalled that active TB requires **a minimum of six months of treatment with up to four different drugs**. To prevent it, early diagnosis, effective treatment compliance, contact tracing studies and screening of at-risk populations are the key elements.

The diversion of TB health workers to COVID-19 has led to a great deterioration in reported TB cases and contact tracing studies. The most severe cases have been detected more easily, as many cases have been diagnosed late, which promotes TB transmission and the increase of TB incidence in the upcoming months and years. To improve this situation, as COVID-19 situation is controlled, COVID-19 professionals (trackers, etc.) should be dedicated to TB control and other unattended mandatory reportable diseases.

Special mention should be made of the fact that the pandemic has favored a pilot study based on a novel tool that enables both the monitoring of treatment by patients via telematics, via video, and its relationship with the health system.

**In Microbiology**, advances have been presented about TB diagnosis, such as the rapid detection of resistance to second-line drugs, and the use in the near future of "electronic-nose" to diagnose TB. Significant investments have been made recently with public funds in numerous centers in our country, to address the surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 transmission through genomic sequencing. It would be unforgivable not to take advantage of this historic opportunity to incorporate TB into this same circuit of genomic epidemiology, after years of having demonstrated, within research projects, the need to precisely describe the chains of tuberculosis transmission through genomic analysis.

**In relation to the clinic**, during the Conference the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the detection and management of TB has been extensively discussed, "In these two years the diagnoses have decreased due to lack of detection, and in hospitals more patients with complicated and even disseminated TB have arrived". Mortality has also increased. This is expected to be worsened in the near future due to the socio-economic inequalities that the pandemic has increased. Although TB treatment and management units are recovering slightly their normal activity, it is estimated that we have gone back about 10 years in the fight against this disease.

Regarding treatment, both speakers and participants **have unanimously denounced the shortage of essential drugs for TB treatment**, most especially about rifampicin, a drug that is necessary. Additionally, it is extremely difficult to get bedaquiline, a drug recommended by the WHO on TB treatments where rifampicin cannot be used. " Considering that TB has an effective treatment and that we are in a European country, this situation is unacceptable". Also, the Europeans patients are at a disadvantage because in this continent rifapentine is not approved, and this drug simplifies the treatments of TB and latent TB infection. This is very frustrating for the TB Research Unit of Barcelona who participated between 2013-2017 in the clinical trials that proved the efficacy of this drug.

**About research**, the Conference has brought to light different clinical trials and multicentric research projects that are being carried out with national or international funding. " **We have TB expert scientists who are competitive worldwide** and this benefits us all. It is important the continue communication between science and health care providers to get patient's health benefit".

**About TB as a zoonoses**, important TB outbreaks have been reported in cows and goats, and it has been emphasized the affectation of wild fauna (wild boar, deer, roe deer, badgers, etc.) which may act as a reservoir. "We cannot forget about human-animal-environment interactions, the **One- Health** concept calls for close coordination between human and animal health, in order to get effective and friendly solutions, involving breeders to ensure the success of the programs".

**The International Conferences organized by the fuiTB** represent a forum that has become **key at the national level, and it is a model of success internationally**. They allow the update of TB study from a multidisciplinary point of view and it is a meeting point of medical, nursing, scientific and other professionals that work in this field.