

National TB guideline revised

Last month Chris Ellis reviewed TB management in Essential CME. The Department of Health has now completed the new TB guidelines for South Africa which we are glad to be able to supply to you as a supplement.

When you page through the 1996 revised TB guideline you may wonder 'so what is new?' The novelty is in the challenge to get our act together to control TB by *simplifying* management. It aims at providing all primary care practitioners with concise and practical information about the diagnosis and management of TB. The streamlined guideline concentrates on management with the 'ifs' and 'buts' confined to footnotes.

The guideline focuses on:

- bacteriological rather than radiological diagnosis;
- four clearly indicated treatment regimens using combination tablets;
- definite treatment end points;
- definite retreatment criteria; and
- purposeful record keeping.

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The guideline limits active contact tracing to young children in order to overcome past cost inefficiencies. A contact is a person who lives in the same home as a TB patient while sputum positive. Chemoprophylaxis is limited to the fives and under.

This guideline is the product of the South African TB Control Programme and its many partners. Partnerships aside, the mark of a good control programme is not what it says, but what it does. The guideline helps to make TB control feasible. However, two long standing challenges are for the health authorities to ensure a reliable drug supply and the necessary laboratory infrastructure.

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