

Directly Observed Therapy for Tuberculosis



Illustration by Ruben DeLuna

Community paramedics collaborate with local public health officials to provide directly observed therapy (DOT) to patients with tuberculosis (TB). The community paramedics dispense medications and observe patients taking them to ensure that treatment protocols are followed, thus preventing the spread of this highly contagious disease.

Results (as of September 30, 2016)

- ▶ Community paramedics dispensed appropriate doses of TB medications and monitored side effects and symptoms that would require a change in treatment regimen.
- ▶ Patients with TB who received DOT from community paramedics were more likely to receive all doses of TB medication prescribed by the TB clinic physician than patients who received DOT from the TB clinic's community health workers. Properly completing dose regimens increases the likelihood that a patient will be cured and not spread infection to others or develop a drug-resistant strain of TB that would be more difficult to treat and to control in the community.

How It Works

Tuberculosis is a highly contagious disease that is treated with special antibiotic medications. The number of medications and frequency of dosing are determined by a physician with expertise in TB treatment. Patients with TB must take their medication as directed, because stopping treatment too soon or missing doses of medication could lead to development of a drug-resistant strain of TB, which poses a public health risk to a community. To ensure that patients with TB take their medication as directed, TB treatment clinics often provide DOT, under which a health care worker gives a patient the medication, observes the patient taking the medication, and monitors the patient for side effects.

In Ventura County, public health officials asked EMS provider partners to provide DOT because the TB clinic does not have sufficient staff to serve all TB patients in the county. The TB clinic's community health workers (CHWs) administer DOT, but they only work on weekdays and thus do not provide DOT on weekends. In addition, the CHWs are based in Oxnard, where the TB clinic is located, and drive as long as 60 minutes to reach some patients because Ventura County covers a large geographic area. In contrast, the community paramedics are stationed throughout the county and can reach patients within 15 minutes.

Partners

LOCAL EMS AGENCY	LEAD AGENCY	HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PARTNER	EMS PROVIDER PARTNER	LOCATION
Ventura	Ventura County EMS Agency	Ventura County Public Health Department	AMR Ventura	Ventura County



For more information on community paramedicine programs operating today in California, visit www.emsa.ca.gov/community_paramedicine.