

T-SPOT[®] TB

New entrant latent tuberculosis
infection screening in the UK

*Case study -
Royal Borough of Greenwich
and Greenwich CCG*





The Royal Borough of Greenwich has the seventh highest incidence of TB of any local authority in England. A successful collaboration between Public Health Greenwich, Greenwich CCG, the Oxleas TB team and Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust contributed to a 35–40% reduction of the incidence of TB in the borough. The decline was predominantly due to pre-entry screening, changes in migration pattern and TB services, as well as efforts to encourage eligible patients to undergo screening for latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI).

Dr Mohammed Tamim, Senior Health Protection Manager at Public Health Greenwich, discusses the implementation of LTBI screening. Dr Tamim and his colleagues worked closely with GP surgeries to make sure all eligible patients were referred to the TB team. He explains how this approach has resulted in high screening numbers and a significant reduction in the incidence of TB in the area.

Identifying barriers

In a GP referral-based programme, one of the key barriers in achieving high screening numbers is reliable referring of new eligible patients to the TB team. Dr Tamim reports that most of the surgeries only referred one or two eligible patients per month. However, **a number of spot checks revealed between 20 and 30 eligible patients per surgery that had not been offered screening.** “This was a big missed opportunity,” Dr Tamim says. “We had to do things differently.”

Another opportunity for improving screening numbers was by encouraging GPs to retrospectively extract the relevant information from existing patients. GP surgeries can use this information to find patients that are eligible for screening, but its usefulness relies heavily on the quality of the data. A key issue is that the patients’ place of birth is not always recorded, making it difficult to analyse the data as eligibility depends on time spent abroad.

Collaborating to overcome the barriers

To address the barriers in the implementation of the test and to encourage more patients to undergo screening, Dr Tamim discussed these barriers in an LTBI review panel together with a respiratory consultant, Oxleas TB nurses and Oxford Immunotec.

Although many GP surgeries are willing to refer new eligible patients, this is not a high enough priority to be successfully implemented. To address this issue, Oxford Immunotec explained how simple the referral process is during training sessions – there is often no need for involvement of the GPs themselves; practice managers, receptionists and practice nurses can do the referrals instead.

Another area in which GP surgeries made significant improvements in patient participation, was by reaching out to existing patients. GP surgeries can identify these patients by going through their patient database retrospectively, but it is often difficult to extract a list of eligible patients. Dr Tamim and his team provide support with the retrospective analysis of GPs surgeries’ databases so that surgeries only need to send out the screening invitation letters.

By explaining the eligibility criteria in the letter along with a lab request form, patients could check their eligibility and give a blood sample at a nearby GP surgery or hospital without having to make an appointment with a GP. According to Dr Tamim this strategy yielded a good response: “It makes the screening as easy and as simple as possible for the patient. In addition, it enabled surgeries to reach many eligible patients who are young and healthy and who rarely visit their GP.”

Success in screening

Thanks to the close collaboration between the different stakeholders and the funding from NHS England, significant improvements have been made in Greenwich. The borough saw a 35–40% reduction in cases of active TB in four years as a result of LTBI screening as well as other factors and activities. Dr Tamim comments: “The LTBI testing and treatment will have an impact; the rate of active TB is going down in our borough, so I’m happy with the programme.”

Out of 993 patients tested with the T-SPOT®.TB test, 21% were positive for LTBI. Of the positive cases, 95–98% were treated successfully. Regarding the role of Oxford Immunotec, Dr Tamim remarked: “I’m happy with their service. Their phlebotomy was easier and their transport mechanism, collection process and reporting are also better. I have already recommended them to three CCGs as well as GP surgeries in Lewisham and Southwark.”

Results of the T-SPOT.TB test in Greenwich



“I’m happy with the work they’ve done to make my life easier”

Continuing the fight against TB

In the near future, Public Health Greenwich plans to expand LTBI screening beyond GP surgeries. According to Dr Tamim: “Awareness is very important; the message from Public Health England is that we should increase awareness in the community. However, it’s challenging to target people who are not registered with a GP.”

One of the strategies to find people who are not registered with their local GP, is to collaborate with universities and colleges to target students in the borough. Due to their age and the fact that many students come from overseas, a high percentage of students will be eligible for screening. To reach as many students as possible Dr Tamim plans to collaborate further with Oxford Immunotec to set up a mobile phlebotomy clinic for a weekly or monthly screening. He says: “We will need a lot of support from them to expand our screening programme even further.”

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