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# HEALTH SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AND PATIENT DELAYS IN ACCESSING TB CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY



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## BACKGROUND

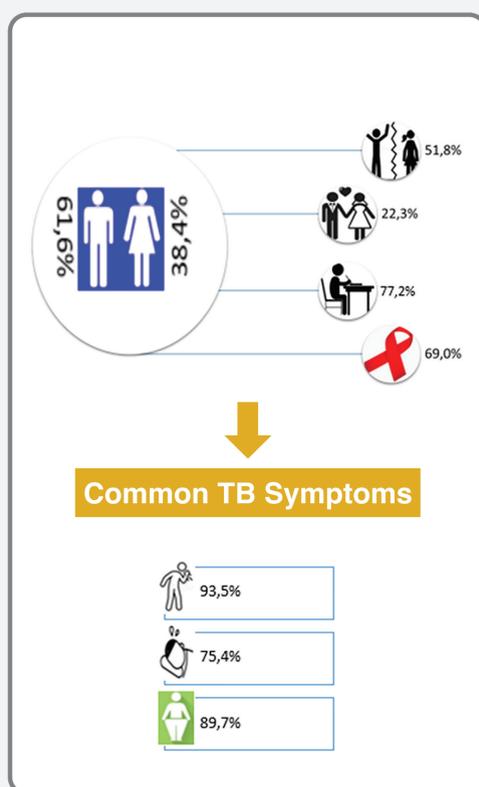
- **Undiagnosed TB** is a reservoir for **TB transmission**.
- **Passive TB case finding**, a widely used approach, could result in a **delayed diagnosis**.
- Our study aimed to describe **health seeking behaviour and patient delay** among TB symptomatic individuals.

## METHODS

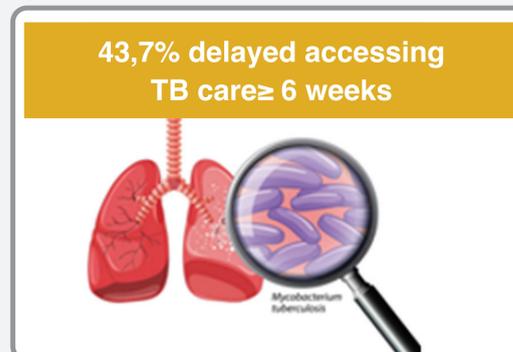
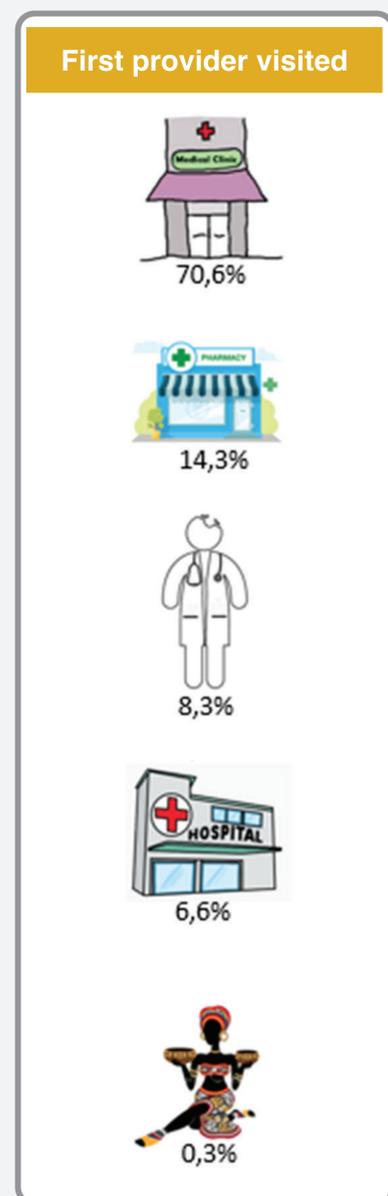
- We enrolled **359 patients (≥18 years)** with pulmonary TB at **TB treatment initiation** in Johannesburg from September 2017 to December 2019 (TB Sequel).
- We used structured questionnaires to collect data on the **presence and duration of TB symptoms** and patterns of **health seeking behaviour**.

## RESULTS

- There were 138 (38.4%) females and 221 (61.6%) males. The mean age was 38.4 years.
- More than half (51.8%) were single and 80 (22.3%) married. 277 (77.2%) completed high school and 247 (69.0%) were HIV positive.
- Common TB symptoms were; cough [331, (93.5%)], night sweats [267 (75.4%)] and weight loss [314 (89.7%)], with majority [136 (37.9%)] experiencing a sum of two TB symptoms.



- Patients went to various healthcare providers for their first visit; primary healthcare clinic [247 (70.6%)], pharmacy [50 (14.3%)], private practitioner [29 (8.3%)], public hospital [23 (6.6%)], and a traditional practitioner [1 (0.3%)]. 101 (28.8%) patients visited ≥2 healthcare providers prior to being diagnosed.
- Since the start of their first TB symptom, patients delayed accessing TB care (patient delay: median = 5 weeks, mean = 9.1 weeks). 153 (43.7%) delayed accessing care for ≥ 6 weeks.



## CONCLUSIONS

- Our study found that a considerable **delay exists between the onset of TB symptoms and accessing TB care**.
- A contribution to this delay stems from **patients visiting multiple healthcare providers** in order to treat their symptoms.
- The opportunity to diagnose TB early at the initial visit may have been missed.
- **Delayed diagnosis** increases **TB transmission in the community** and leads to **poorer patient outcomes**.
- Future research should explore the patient and healthcare perspective for reasons of delayed health care seeking.

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