

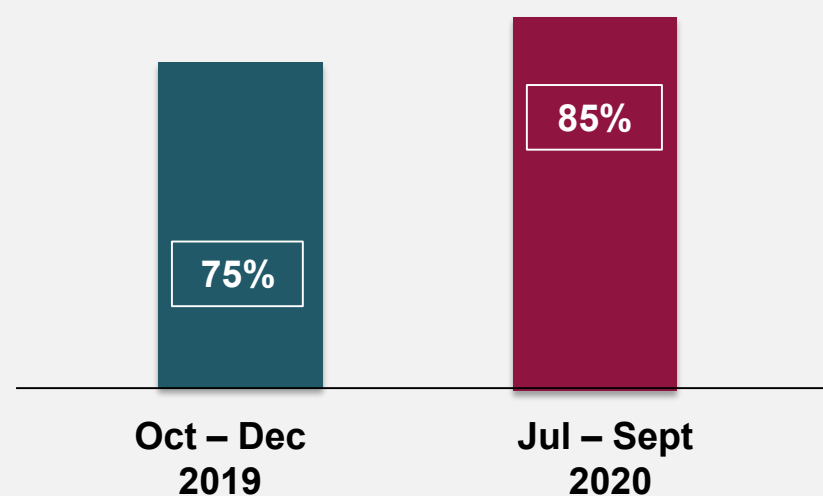
Barriers to retention on treatment for Tuberculosis in Lango sub-region of northern Uganda

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Background

From October 2019 to September 2020, the treatment success rate (TSR) for all forms of TB in Lango sub-region, northern Uganda improved from 75%, against the national target of 90%.



Despite this improvement, several districts in the region had TSR below 90%.

An analysis of project data in 13 high-volume facilities showed an average loss to follow-up (LTFU) rate of 16%, and deaths (9%) as major factors contributing to sub-optimal TSR.

LTFU TB patients are those that had been on TB treatment for one month and above, but who missed treatment for two consecutive months or more

Intervention or response

JSI-led USAID Regional Health Integration to Enhance Services-North, Lango (RHITES-North, Lango) project data for July-September 2020 was reviewed to identify and prioritize sites with high LTFU rates for TB clients.

The project developed a root-cause analysis tool, pre-tested it for validity and reliability, then oriented District TB and Leprosy supervisors and health facility TB focal persons on its use. The TB focal persons and supervisors then interviewed patients who had missed TB medicine refills during this time to identify reasons for missing refills.

279 patients (mean age 37 years, 65% male) who had missed a TB medicine refill were interviewed - 91% were newly diagnosed TB cases, 7% were patients who returned after LTFU, while 3% were relapse patients.

Results

REASONS FOR MISSED APPOINTMENTS

32%

High transport costs to treatment units

9%

Travelling away from treatment centre

8%

Forgotten appointment

8%

Sickness

6%

Resolved symptoms



SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY PATIENTS INCLUDE

- ❖ Delivering medicines in the community
- ❖ Use of community volunteers to refill medicines
- ❖ Representation at the clinic by a treatment supporter
- ❖ Transfer of patients to treatment facilities closer to their homes
- ❖ Sending appointment reminders via m-health platforms like SMS

Conclusions

High transport costs to a treatment unit is the most common barrier to retention on treatment for TB in northern Uganda. To address remaining gaps in TSR and improve patients' lives, programs should strengthen community support systems for TB patients that increase medicine access and retention in care.