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- Zika - Confirmed and Probable Cases; United States, 2016; 9-10/16
- Zika Sexual Transmission Update; 3-4/16
IS IT TUBERCULOSIS? - Louisiana, 2014

Louis Trachtman, MD, MPH; Charles DeGraw BA

While the annual number of cases of both active tuberculosis (TB) and TB infection reported to the Department of Health and Hospitals’ Office of Public Health (OPH) are low and declining, TB is still a danger in Louisiana. As the systems of medical care in the United States and in Louisiana undergo changes, those who work in the Tuberculosis Control Program wish to remind all physicians and allied health care providers that TB is neither a rare disease nor just a fascinating disease studied in school. It is certainly not a disease of the past (Photo 1).

Photo 1: Dr. Edward L. Trudeau (1848 - 1915) established the first laboratory dedicated to the study of tuberculosis (1894) at Saranac Lake, NY. (Credit: Wikipedia.org)

Testing of the patients for TB was done in quick order (also positive for Mycobacterium tuberculosis). Appropriate drug treatment was started, the cases were reported to OPH, interviews were conducted with the patients by public health workers, and contacts were notified and tested for TB. Unfortunately, several other close contacts, including children, were already infected and needed treatment. Fortunately, none of these contacts had yet developed the active disease. Several weeks later, sputum cultures from the cases proved positive for M. tuberculosis.

Photo 2: Mycobacterium tuberculosis (Credit: CDC/Dr. George P. Kubica)

Case Study
In early 2014, two cases of active TB were reported to OPH. Both cases, each from different parts of Louisiana, were followed for weeks as out-patients for symptomatic chronic bronchitis with compatible chest x-ray findings. Neither patient gave a history of exposure to TB, but both patients seemed unresponsive to symptomatic treatment or antibiotics. Both patients’ physicians chose to obtain sputum samples and have the sputum smears examined microscopically for acid-fast organisms. The samples were found to be positive (Photo 2).

Testing of the patients for TB was done in quick order (also positive for Mycobacterium tuberculosis). Appropriate drug treatment was started, the cases were reported to OPH, interviews were conducted with the patients by public health workers, and contacts were notified and tested for TB. Unfortunately, several other close contacts, including children, were already infected and needed treatment. Fortunately, none of these contacts had yet developed the active disease. Several weeks later, sputum cultures from the cases proved positive for M. tuberculosis.

Mandatory Reporting
Health care practitioners who diagnose active TB, a Class B Disease,* are legally required report their diagnosis to OPH within one business day. Because of its scarcity and symptomatic similarity to other infections, cases of TB are often discovered later than other infectious diseases. Physicians and allied health care providers must keep TB in mind when diagnosing patients with TB symptoms.

* Sanitary Code on Page 8

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