

Characteristics and treatment outcome of tuberculosis in the elderly in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Tuberculosis (TB) remains a major global issue despite the World Health Organisation's goal to "end the TB epidemic by 2035". The TB burden is particularly challenging in the elderly due to immunosenescence and associated comorbidities. This imposes a continuous battle in managing elderly TB. **Objective:** Here we present the characteristics of TB cases in Malaysians aged 65 and above, and their treatment outcome. **Materials and methods:** Data was obtained from the Malaysian TB Information System (TBIS) between 2013 and 2018. All cases aged 65 and above were included in this study. Retrospective analysis and comparison of multiple patient and outcome variables, such as sociodemographic and clinical findings, were done. **Results and conclusion:** Total cases reported were 147,667 where 13.4% were aged 65 and above. 67.5% were 65 to 74 years old, 28.3% were 75 to 84 years old and 4.2% were 85 years old and above. Elderly TB cases were found to be higher in males (69.3%), Malaysians (97.6%), Malay (39.7%), rural residents (52.7%), and had only primary schooling (34.3%). 30.8% had Diabetes Mellitus, 28.3% were smokers and 0.7% had HIV. Pulmonary TB was the most common type (88.9%), and 0.7% had miliary TB. 0.2% were reported to be multidrug-resistant TB. 49.7% had minimal lesions on X-ray, 37.1% had moderately advanced lesions, 7.3% had no lesion and 4.4% had far advanced lesions. Treatment were completed in 94.9%, where 28.86% were unsuccessful. Unsuccessful TB treatment were found to be higher in males (73.69%), Malaysian (97.90%), Malay (34.46%), rural residents (60.76%), those who had no formal education (40.70%), those with pulmonary TB (90.10%) and minimal lesions on Xray (49.44%). Elderly TB in Malaysia is prevalent, with a high rate of unsuccessful treatment. The rise in the elderly population will likely cause a higher elderly TB burden in the future, posing a grave challenge to the WHO strategy in Malaysia.

Keywords: Elderly, Tuberculosis, unsuccessful treatment, Malaysia