

# The syndemic of “COVID-19 and tuberculosis”

It's been a long time since the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations pledged to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) by the year 2035.<sup>[1]</sup> Lately, their focus has switched to a deadly airborne infectious disease of the current world. The failure towards the elimination of TB regardless of a wide array of accurate, affordable point-of-care testing and public health tools serves as a warning for other diseases.

TB management has suffered a lot due to healthcare resources being diverted away towards coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). In just a few months, this pandemic reversed years of progress made in the fight against TB. TB is a long-term problem which needs immediate attention. COVID-19 has a vaccine available, and therefore no more remains a concern.<sup>[2,3]</sup>

The diagnosis of TB is a complex process as the infected individuals need to have knowledge of symptoms and access to health facilities. Many patients remain undiagnosed or are diagnosed late, which may result in high transmission and poor disease outcome. Proper and timely TB screening can reduce the delay in diagnosis and hence treatment.

On the other hand, diagnosis of COVID-19 is rapid and simpler. TB diagnosis requires smear microscopy, growth on culture with extended incubation time, which may be prolonged up to 6 weeks. This needs to be followed by the identification of the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* complex (MTBC) strain and drug susceptibility testing (DST).<sup>[2]</sup>

TB, being associated with poverty, makes treatment delivery a challenge. The overall treatment remains expensive because drugs are to be consumed with other combination drugs. Due to the low-cost generic substitutes and patent security on these drugs, not many of these drugs are available in the market.<sup>[4]</sup>

This danger of TB emphasises the significance of continuing healthcare involvement in TB as well as the need for more infection-control-friendly facilities.<sup>[5]</sup>

COVID-19 has taught us valuable public health lessons that can be applied to upgrade and boost the efforts to combat TB and other infectious diseases. COVID-19 has demonstrated that strong democratic leadership and financial support for vaccination will result in considerable benefits in public health and scientific achievements in the battle against infectious diseases.<sup>[6,7]</sup>

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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