



# EMPOWERING CHANGE: MY INTERNSHIP JOURNEY WITH DEEPAK FOUNDATION FOR PATIENT-PROVIDER SUPPORT AGENCY (PPSA) UNDER THE NATIONAL TUBERCULOSIS ELIMINATION PROGRAM (NTEP)

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**Abstract:** Internships are an essential part of a student's educational journey, providing practical exposure to real-world scenarios and allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations. My internship with the Deepak Foundation for Patient-Provider Support Agency (PPSA) under the National Tuberculosis Elimination Program (NTEP) was a transformative experience that empowered me with a deeper understanding of public health initiatives and the challenges faced in eradicating tuberculosis. The framework of the National Tuberculosis Elimination Program (NTEP), specifically working with the Patient-Provider Support Agency (PPSA). This narrative encapsulates my journey as I engaged with a multidisciplinary team dedicated to fostering change at the grassroots level. Through collaborative efforts, the PPSA seeks to bridge gaps between patients and healthcare providers, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of tuberculosis (TB) treatment and care. Over the internship duration, I observed and contributed to innovative strategies aimed at improving patient education, provider training, and systemic communication. This abstract offers insight into the challenges, successes, and lessons learned during my association with the PPSA. By delving into the intricacies of this internship, it underscores the significance of comprehensive support frameworks in realizing national public health objectives, ultimately contributing to the larger goal of tuberculosis elimination.

**Keywords:** NTEP, PPSA, Public Health, Tuberculosis.

## I. INTRODUCTION:

The National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP) is a public health initiative launched by the government of India to control and eventually eliminate tuberculosis (TB) from the country. The program was launched in 1962 and is currently known as the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP).

The NTEP aims to provide quality diagnosis and treatment for TB patients, increase public awareness about TB, and strengthen the healthcare system's capacity to prevent and control TB. It focuses on early detection of TB cases, ensuring proper treatment adherence, and monitoring the progress of TB control efforts.

Key components of the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme include:

- 1. Microscopic Diagnosis:** The NTEP promotes the use of sputum smear microscopy to accurately diagnose TB cases, as it is a cost-effective and widely available diagnostic tool.
- 2. Free Diagnosis and Treatment:** The program offers free diagnosis and treatment for TB patients, including free medications and medical services.
- 3. Public-Private Partnership:** The NTEP collaborates with private healthcare providers to ensure early diagnosis and proper treatment of TB cases in the private sector.
- 4. Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) activities:** The program conducts awareness campaigns to educate the public about TB, its symptoms, and the importance of early diagnosis and treatment.
- 5. Monitoring and Evaluation:** The NTEP monitors the progress of TB control efforts through regular reporting, data analysis, and evaluation of program activities.
- 6. Capacity Building:** The program focuses on strengthening the skills and capacities of healthcare workers, laboratory technicians, and other stakeholders involved in TB control.

The National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme has significantly contributed to reducing the burden of TB in India. However, despite these efforts, TB remains a major public health concern in the country, with high prevalence rates. The government continues to work towards achieving the goal of TB elimination through ongoing interventions and strategies.

## II. EMBARKING ON A PURPOSEFUL PATH: INTERNSHIP

During my enriching internship experience, I eagerly embraced a purposeful journey aimed at creating positive societal impact. Immersed in their dedicated team, I collaborated on diverse projects, from healthcare initiatives and education campaigns to community development efforts, allowing me to cultivate invaluable skills while contributing to meaningful and sustainable changes in underserved communities.

- **Foundation Profile:** Founded in 1982, the Deepak Foundation evolved from providing healthcare facilities to local communities in Nandesari to becoming a leading non-profit civil society organization. The foundation's mission is to empower underprivileged and unreached communities, ensuring holistic development, economic stability, and a life of dignity. Serving as a Patient-Provider Support Agency (PPSA) under NTEP in 21 districts across three divisions (Gwalior, Sagar, Jabalpur) in Madhya Pradesh, the foundation focuses on diagnosis, treatment, and care of TB patients in both public and private sectors.
- **Duration and Role:** My internship with the Deepak Foundation took place from May 2023 to August 2023. During this period, I had the opportunity, contributing to various tasks within the PPSA program. This role allowed me to gain comprehensive insights into the program's operations and organizational structure. Under the expert guidance of my supervisor, I undertook diverse responsibilities, including field visits, interaction with tuberculosis patients, and participation in seminars and educational initiatives.

- **Program Objectives:** The PPSA program aims to accelerate the early detection of tuberculosis cases in high-risk groups, ensure appropriate linkages and referrals, institutionalize mechanisms for sample collection, provide access to quality diagnostic investigations, and enhance pre-treatment evaluation for patients. By engaging both the public and private sectors, the program seeks to provide end-to-end treatment and care for tuberculosis patients.

### III. LEARNING AND EXPOSURE:

The internship provided me with an invaluable learning experience that equipped me with practical skills, insights into program management, and a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding tuberculosis eradication efforts. I had the privilege of observing and participating in various aspects of the PPSA program, such as patient notifications, contact tracing, treatment adherence, and beneficiary transfers. This exposure enabled me to understand the challenges faced by tuberculosis patients and their families, shedding light on the need for holistic support.

- **Skills Developed:** Throughout the internship, I developed a range of skills that are essential for effective program coordination and community engagement. These skills include cross-cultural communication, active listening, cultural sensitivity, empathy, conflict resolution, and building rapport with diverse stakeholders. I also gained proficiency in data collection, analysis, and reporting, essential for monitoring and evaluating the program's impact.
- **Application of Research Skills:** One of the highlights of my internship was the application of public health research skills within the community. I immersed myself in the community, collected health data using various techniques, and conducted interviews and surveys to understand their needs and challenges. This research formed the foundation for designing evidence-based interventions tailored to the community's health requirements.
- **Understanding Funding Sources:** I also gained insights into the funding landscape for public health programs. I learned about different funding sources, such as governmental grants, NGOs, private foundations, and international donors. Additionally, I understood the importance of sustainability planning and developing strong partnerships to ensure the continuation of programs beyond the initial funding period.

Learning experiences and skills gained from involvement with the Deepak Foundation and work related to tuberculosis (TB) projects. Various aspects of their involvement, including field visits and patient interaction, knowledge of the Patient-Provider Support Agency (PPSA), understanding of active and latent TB, sample collection procedure, FDC process and medication distribution, collaboration and teamwork, communication skills, understanding of healthcare systems, use of Nikshay software, public health principles and practices, community engagement, interprofessional collaboration, program planning and evaluation, and familiarity with healthcare systems and policies.

#### IV. CHALLENGES:

- **Community Engagement:** Encouraging active participation and engagement from community members in TB awareness and prevention programs might have been a challenge, particularly if there were pre-existing cultural beliefs or social stigmas associated with the disease.
- **Access to Remote Areas:** Reaching and providing TB services to remote and geographically isolated areas may have posed logistical challenges, including limited transportation infrastructure and difficulty in accessing healthcare facilities.
- **Sustained Treatment Adherence:** Ensuring consistent adherence to TB treatment regimens among patients could have been a challenge, as factors such as socioeconomic status, education level, and access to healthcare services can influence treatment compliance.
- **Public-Private Collaboration:** Fostering effective collaboration between public and private healthcare sectors to ensure comprehensive TB care and treatment might have been challenging due to differing priorities, resources, and organizational structures.
- **Resource Allocation:** Optimizing resource allocation for TB control activities, including diagnostic tests, medications, and healthcare personnel, may have been challenging given budget constraints and competing health priorities.
- **Data Management and Reporting:** Collecting, managing, and reporting accurate data on TB cases, treatment outcomes, and program performance could have been challenging due to limited capacity, inconsistent reporting practices, and data quality issues.
- **Healthcare Worker Training:** Providing adequate training and support for healthcare workers involved in TB diagnosis, treatment, and care may have been challenging, particularly in areas with limited access to professional development opportunities.
- **Stigma and Discrimination:** Addressing stigma and discrimination associated with TB within healthcare settings and communities might have been a challenge, as negative perceptions about the disease can hinder efforts to encourage early diagnosis and treatment-seeking behavior.

#### V. CONCLUSION:

My internship journey with the Deepak Foundation's Patient-Provider Support Agency has been a transformative experience that has enriched my understanding of public health initiatives and the complexities of tuberculosis elimination efforts. Through hands-on involvement, interaction with tuberculosis patients, and application of research skills, I have gained practical insights that will undoubtedly shape my future endeavours in the field of public health. This experience has reaffirmed my commitment to making a positive impact on the health and well-being of marginalized communities. As I reflect on my time with the foundation, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to meaningful change and advocate for improved healthcare access for all. The Deepak Foundation's dedication to fostering change at the grassroots level serves as an inspiration for future public health professionals, reminding us of the importance of collaborative efforts, comprehensive support frameworks, and a steadfast commitment to realizing national public health objectives.

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