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Background

Barriers limiting access to tuberculosis (TB) services occur at the individual and provider/system levels and contribute to diagnosis and treatment delay. The aim of our study was to assess determinants of delay in TB patients living in Sicily, Italy.

Methods

A web-based questionnaire investigating demographic and clinical aspects, attitudes towards TB, stigma, integration level, delay in diagnosis and treatment, was administered to patients with active pulmonary TB admitted to the participating hospitals. The total delay (TD) was categorized into patient delay (PD, from symptoms onset to first contact with healthcare services) and health system delay (HSD, from first contact to diagnosis).

Results

During the period October 2014-February 2016, 118 patients were enrolled (male 66.1%; mean age 42.2 ± 20 ys; foreign-born 50%). Median PD, HSD and TD were 30, 19.5 and 63 days, respectively. The median HSD was lower in foreign-born patients (10 vs. 31 days; p 0.003). Using logistic regression analysis, factors associated with longer delay were: for PD, chronic comorbidities and stigma; for HSD being foreign-born, prior unspecific antibiotic treatment and consultations with multiple health care providers.

Conclusions

The pillar of the post-2015 End TB Strategy (WHO) focuses on timely TB diagnosis and therapy to prevent transmission and universal, easy access to TB care and services. Our Results confirm stigma, antibiotic treatment and number of health care contacts as determinants of TB delay. A strong emphasis on patients education and healthcare providers training is recommended to provide basic knowledge about the disease and to reduce TB transmission in the community.

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Key messages:

- TB delay in Sicily is substantial, especially among autochthonous patients
- Strategies to increase awareness about TB in patients and healthcare providers, such as general practitioners, should be urgently addressed

Determinants of patient and health-care system delay in the diagnosis of tuberculosis in Sicily

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