



II. Welcome & Report on USAID San Diego Border Project – Kathy Moser

Puentes de Esperanza - Executive Summary

Program Description

Multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) threatens communities across the globe. It is difficult and expensive to cure and the resources to fight these strains do not exist in many areas of the world. This is the situation in Baja California, where an estimated 50-100 individuals are afflicted. Unable to get curative treatment, MDR patients in Baja California become increasingly ill over a period of years during which they are able to spread disease within border communities and areas in the interior of both countries.

The spread of MDR-TB across international boundaries has pushed industrialized nations to recognize this disease as a looming global public health crisis. In 2003, 75% of MDR cases (86/114) in the US were foreign-born. Mexico was the top country of origin for the foreign-born MDR cases (18/86), comprising 21% of the total non-US born patients. In 2002, 26% of all of California's cases were born in Mexico. From 1994-2002, 24% of the 374 MDR cases in California were born in Mexico. In a recent study, levels of MDR-TB in Baja California were an alarming 22% in previously treated patients.

In Baja California, current resources are not adequate to ensure that all MDR patients have the opportunity for curative therapy. Building this capacity will provide hope for MDR patients across the northern Baja region. The selection of Tijuana and Mexicali is expected to have a spillover effect into other parts of Baja California and California, and ultimately to other border regions and interior states throughout both nations.

Program goals and objectives

The proposed project will create a binational alliance of providers and organizations dedicated to developing capacity to treat MDR-TB patients in the California-Baja California region. The primary goal of this binational consortium will be to create the infrastructure to support early recognition of affected patients and outreach services to assist patients with successful adherence to treatment.

The *Puentes de Esperanza* project will develop a binational model for sharing professional expertise and demonstrate success in providing access to vital services for patients with the most difficult forms of TB. Training and education of providers and health care workers, and creation of a sustainable cross-border exchange of expertise are primary program objectives.

Proposed interventions/Technical Approach

This project will enhance activities already underway in Baja California to control the development and spread of resistant strains of TB. Essential elements of the initiative include

1. Laboratory capacity building through parallel specimen processing and training.



2. A binational consultation system linking experts from California, Colorado, Baja California and Mexico City. The partners will confer and monitor patient clinical progress and outcomes regularly through teleconferences and in-person case conferences.
3. Assurance of a steady supply of second-line drugs.
4. Treatment of 10-20 MDR patients in existing TB specialty clinics in Baja California with 80% of patients completing fully supervised therapy.
5. Training of outreach workers to support patient adherence through a strict program of directly observed therapy.
6. Education of community professionals at all practice levels (including physicians, nurses, health authorities) involved in TB care.

Partners

The Public Health Institute (PHI) is a non-governmental organization based in California with over 40 years of experience in public health cross-sector projects and will be the fiscal agent for the *Puentes de Esperanza* project. The San Diego TB Program will be the U.S. hub of day-to-day operations. Other key partners will be ISESALUD in Baja California Norte, the Sociedad de Neumología y Cirugía de Torax de Baja California, the Instituto Nacional de Enfermedades Respiratorias in Mexico City, Project Concern International, the Francis J. Curry National Tuberculosis Center in San Francisco, the National Jewish Medical and Research Center in Colorado, Unidad Fronteriza de Medicina Preventiva, is a private unit in Tijuana focusing on preventive medicine, Rotary International, the State of California TB Control Branch and the Lash Foundation.

Expected Impact and Sustainability

In the first year, 10-20 MDR-TB patients will receive treatment. However, the impact will be broader since transmission of this airborne disease will be curtailed. Therefore, treatment of 20 patients can prevent more than 200 new infections with MDR-TB.

Puentes de Esperanza is envisioned as a 3-5 year project commencing March 1, 2005. During these years, infrastructure to treat MDR patients will be developed and each activity will be developed with sustainability as an explicit goal. Long-term relationships will be built and maintained between providers in the US and Mexico to share expertise in the care of these complex patients and providers in Mexico will share their experience with local colleagues. Sustainability will also be facilitated by inclusion of new partners in the fight against TB, such as Rotary International and the Lash Foundation.

Within three years, the strengthening of directly observed therapy for general TB cases, already underway with separate USAID funding, will permit Baja California to meet the requirements of the WHO's Green Light Committee to acquire second line anti-tuberculosis drugs at greatly reduced prices. The enhancements in infrastructure and training for MDR management, coupled with procurement of essential drugs at a 95% reduction in cost will ensure a sustainable program for the cure of MDR patients in Baja California.