

# Overcoming challenges in TB care: from policy to practice

## Telegram Channel – *TB is curable!* An innovative approach to engage with the community

Veena Karir  
Médecins Sans Frontières

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# Introduction

- CHALLENGES
  - Myths and/or lack of understanding about TB & particularly in a region where the TB prevalence is high & with a concentration of MDR TB
  - Stigma associated with TB
  - Karakalpakstan is a vast area relative to population size (3X size of the Netherlands)
- Community engagement – already happening via mass-media (radio), workshops, and public events (WTBD), etc.
- Is there a more innovative approach? *Who are we not reaching?*

# 2019 – Looked to social media ....

- **Telegram app** – widely used among other apps throughout Karakalpakstan region
- **Target** – Karakalpakstan population with access to social media (ages 15 – 50)
- **Regional language** – available only in Karakalpak language - but Kazakh & Uzbek language speakers can understand
- **Privacy** of a messaging app – questions asked without embarrassment or fear associated with stigma of TB
- **Resources** – HR to manage site; stable mobile data package for real-time exchange during Q&A with subscribers

# How does it work?



## Components of the Telegram channel – *TB is curable!*

1. **Telegram channel** “@tb\_is\_curable”
2. **Interactive BOT** (Telegram account operated by software) “@TB\_myths\_bot” includes: information on TB, myths and concepts - interactive (taken from patient FGD recommendations)
3. **Anonymous Q&A** “@TB\_is\_curable\_QA\_bot”  
MoH & MSF doctors respond to questions confidentially to individuals & also paraphrased and posted on channel (anonymously)

# How does it work?



1. **Download & install** the Telegram app on your device
2. **Search** for the channel @tb\_is\_curable! & *press the “Join” button*
3. **Subscribe** to channel @tb\_is\_curable (*now you can view*)
4. **Activate BOT** to submit questions @TB\_is\_curable\_QA\_bot (*now you can ask your question*)
5. **Activate** @TB\_myths\_bot to browse the “menu” of information



# Q & A – examples



**# 1 Q: *Do TB health providers take medications to prevent becoming sick with TB? How do they protect themselves from the disease?***

**A:** TB specialists do not take any medications for TB. They pay attention to their nutrition habits and support their health by exercising and keeping rules of infection control.

**#2 Q: *How many types of TB exist?***

**A:** TB disease is divided into 2 types: pulmonary and extra pulmonary TB. The extra pulmonary TB affects body parts other than lungs. They can affect bones, brain, kidneys, stomach, skin, eyes, etc.

**#3 Q: *I fell sick with TB 1.5 years ago. Yesterday evening I had a bad fever. My body temperature reached 38.5 C. What could be the reason behind? Can it be because of the ulcer in my lungs? I do not have a cough now.***

**A:** You should see the doctor immediately. Have your lungs checked and X-rayed. You might have a cold or flu other than the pulmonary TB. Sudden onset of fever may be caused by the flu.

# Response



- Initial **subscribers** – 130; as of beginning Feb 2020 – **327**
- **Posts** avg **594 hits** (Jan 2020 data)
- **Weekly posts** also shared with other channels; can generate > **10,000 views**

# Lessons learned



- Getting new subscribers is challenging; takes time
- More “views” requires active promotion & monitoring of site (spam, medical team)
- Investing in custom designed posts has some advantages (“more catchy”)



# Summary



- Telegram channel – *TB is curable!* is an innovative real-time exchange platform to increase awareness and engage with the community about TB and without stigma
- Available anytime from any part of the world where individuals subscribe to telegram & have internet access
- Can be adopted to other priorities and/or contexts
- Minimal resource investment

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*Ден-саулықты сақтау министрлиги менен  
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**Overcoming challenges in TB care: from policy to practice**  
9<sup>th</sup> TB Symposium – Ministry of Health of Ukraine  
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