

Researcher speeds up TB detection in Cambodia

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Tuberculosis (TB) is still a major health problem in Cambodia. Natalie Lorent, PhD student at the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) and the University of Antwerp (UA), conducted her research in the slums of Phnom Penh, where tuberculosis (TB) wreaks havoc. Lorent and her team developed a more effective approach to actively detect TB cases by using new diagnostic tools and strong involvement by the local community. The new approach allowed health workers to detect TB cases more quickly, which reduces the risk of further transmission of the disease.

"We were able to detect TB cases among the urban poor, who have far less access to [health](#) care. Untreated patients may die of the disease but they may also infect others around them. It is therefore important to find and treat new cases as soon as possible," said Natalie Lorent.

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease that spreads through the air. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than a third of cases of tuberculosis remains undiagnosed or untreated in Cambodia, especially among the poor.

The current TB approach in Cambodia is insufficient. Natalie Lorent and her team developed an "active case finding strategy", whereby community [health workers](#) visit people at home to actively detect TB symptoms and collect sputum (mucus and saliva) for analysis in local laboratories. They made use of new diagnostic tests that until recently were not available in the country. Results were communicated via mobile

phone enabling rapid referral and treatment. Thanks to this comprehensive, patient-centered approach, both drug-sensitive and drug-resistant TB could be diagnosed quickly in poor high-risk groups in Phnom Penh.

During her PhD research Lorent worked for 4 years in Sihanouk Hospital Centre of Hope (SHCH), an ITM partner institute in Phnom Penh.

Natalie Lorent successfully defended her doctoral research 'Early diagnosis and care of [tuberculosis](#) through community-based active case-finding in poor urban settlements of Phnom Penh, Cambodia' on Friday 2 October 2015 at the University of Antwerp.

Provided by Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp

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