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From the Field: Imams Encourage TB Treatment in Tajikistan

Posted by [Aniir Elnazarova](#) on Tuesday, July 3rd 2012

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As a community health specialist with USAID's Quality Health Care Project in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, I educate community members, medical workers, patients, and their families about tuberculosis (TB) diagnosis, treatment, and infection control. My job involves being constantly available and responsive to the needs of patients and their families, and I tend to work unusual hours in order to fit into their schedules. Still, I was a bit surprised when I received a call from Safarov Khudodod in the middle of the night last month. Khudodod is an imam, a religious leader at his mosque, and he was so excited about a TB testing referral he made after his sermon that he couldn't wait until the morning to share it with me.

"I heard the man coughing and approached him to ask him about his symptoms. I encouraged him to get tested. He just reported back to me that he tested positive for TB and will begin treatment immediately," he said.

Imams in Tajikistan play a major role in the lives of their congregations. They lead ceremonies such as weddings and funerals and provide religious advice to those seeking it. USAID is working with religious leaders in Tajikistan to inform them about the causes and treatment of TB. USAID workshops are helping participants like Imam Khudodod to encourage known TB patients in their communities to get treatment and teach them how to avoid transmitting the disease to others. I meet with workshop participants several times a year to help them complete self-designed outreach plans. The 62 people we've trained have already reached approximately 20,000 community members.



Imam Safarov Khudodod listens to another community volunteer during a USAID Community Action for Health training. Photo: USAID QHCP

Before he attended USAID's TB workshop, Imam Khudodod told us he knew very little about TB. "Before, we thought that TB was a genetic disease, but now we know it isn't. Many people in my community think that TB isn't curable, so they don't get treatment. I share information about TB at all of my meetings with my congregation, even at weddings and births. I have already reached out to over 5,000 people."

Tajikistan has the highest rate of TB incidence in Central Asia and one of the highest multi-drug resistant TB rates in the world. Encouraging individuals to complete treatment and teaching them basic rules of infection control are key steps in eradicating TB in countries like Tajikistan.

Imam Khudodod is optimistic about the future of TB in his country. "I think that the next generation will be healthy and will know about TB."

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