Understanding Pacific tuberculosis: a Tuvalu case

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Tuvalu in the Pacific
Tuvalu, formerly Ellice Islands, and part of the Western Pacific Commission

Inter-island travel is by boat
Outline

• Unpacking layers
  – A TB outbreak in Auckland
  – TB & colonisation
  – The Tuvalu ecosystem
  – Tuvaluans in NZ

• Making links
A TB outbreak in Auckland

• 2002-3 within small Tuvalu community 24 children and young people got TB disease
• Single cluster of 10 households
• Person who was ‘source’ was from Tuvalu originally
• High TB rates in Tuvalu, but dropping since 1990
• A transnational outbreak
10 years of TB in NZ

![Graph showing TB incidence rates for different ethnic groups in NZ]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>TB incidence rate per 100,000 population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>3, 1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All groups</td>
<td>16.6, 14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>30.7, 30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvaluan</td>
<td>315, 380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1997-2002 (light blue) vs 2003-2008 (dark red)

Courtesy of Auckland Regional Public Health Service
Some TB figures for Tuvalu

• 2002 – incidence rate around 200/100,000
• Successful treatment rate had dropped to around 40% in 2002
• Latest figure show improvement to about 155/100,000 (18 new cases/year)
• Incidence rates approximately halved from 1990 to 2009 – but high till 1990
• Population of Tuvalu c 10,500, 50% in Funafuti
Layers: TB & colonisation

• No TB in Tuvalu before colonisation
• How had TB become so prevalent?
• Historical political economy
• Syndemic relationships
  – Other diseases
  – Tobacco
  – Socio-ecological conditions

Funafuti lagoon, land and ocean from the Suva-Funafuti flight (2x/wk)
The Tuvalu ecosystem

- More syndemic interactions

Flooded borrow pit from airstrip construction

Pulaka pit, Funafuti
Looking to the future
But airstrips can be handy
Tuvaluans in NZ

- A series of communities centred round churches and islands.
- Many in low paid jobs or under-employed
- Immigration status issues
- A lot of hardship
- Active communities

Upper, TB workshop
Lower, Tuvalu village, Pasifika 2010
Conclusions

- Linkages
  - History of colonialism in Tuvalu
  - Under-resourced colony leading to current conditions
    - Education
    - Health
    - Infrastructure
  - Labour migrations then and now
  - NZ immigration policy
  - Current patterns of health and illness
Thanks

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