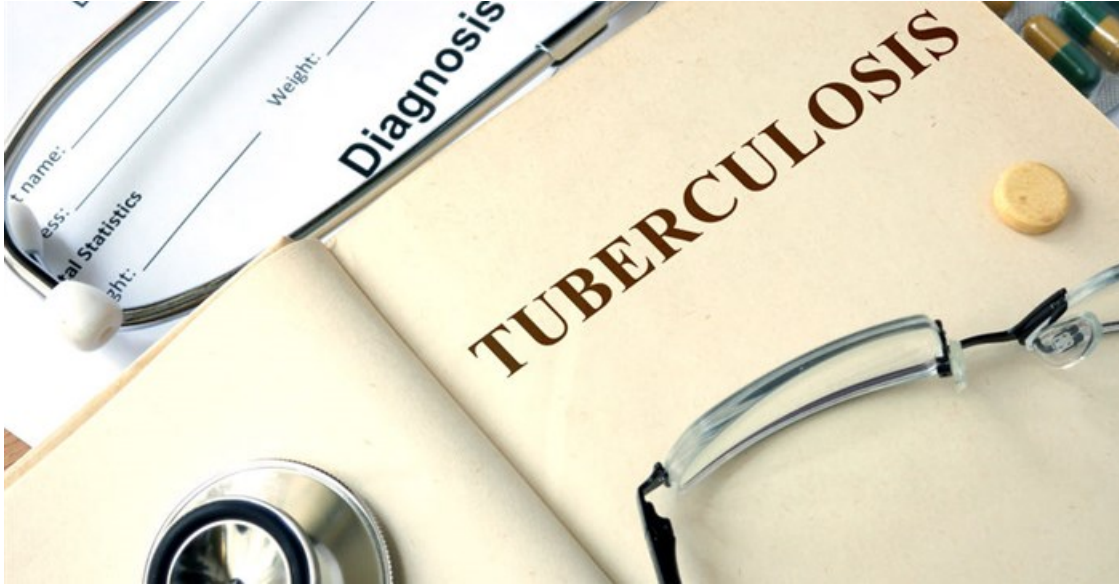


SU scientists develop a TB rapid screening test

A point-of-care rapid diagnostic test for tuberculosis (TB) has been developed by a multinational team of scientists led by researchers at Stellenbosch University.



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Diagnosis within an hour

“This low-cost screening test has the potential to significantly speed up TB diagnosis in resource-limited setting,” says co-inventor, Professor Gerhard Walzl of Stellenbosch University’s faculty of medicine and health sciences. The test comprises a finger-prick blood test and can make a TB diagnosis in less than an hour.

The diagnostic test is a hand-held, battery-operated instrument that will measure chemicals in the blood of people with possible TB. The device is currently in developmental phase and its accuracy and efficacy will be tested in five African countries over the next three years by the ScreenTB consortium, a team of TB experts from eight African and European partnering institutions.

Grass-roots level

“Healthcare workers with minimal training will be able use the test at grass-roots level and get immediate access to screening test results,” says Walzl.

Other recent advances in TB diagnostics have radically improved diagnostic times, but high costs and the sophisticated equipment required have made this technology inaccessible to many.

“People in remote areas with high TB incidence still do not benefit from the newer developments and face long diagnostic delays and often multiple return visits to clinics before they are diagnosed,” says Walzl.

The new test will be able to provide near-immediate results that will enable a person with TB to be diagnosed and started on treatment during a single visit to a healthcare facility.

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