



Brazilian Tuberculosis Research Network: 20 years of history in the fight against Tuberculosis

Ethel L. Maciel¹, Ricardo A. Arcêncio¹, José R. Lapa e Silva¹

TO THE EDITOR,

In July 2001, a group of researchers from different fields of knowledge met in the auditorium of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) with the bold intention of creating a research network devoted to tuberculosis (TB)-related issues using a synergistic and comprehensive approach. Although the idea of launching a collaborative network was unusual at the time, since the recruited researchers often competed with each other in the past due to the scarce funding and promotion of science in Brazil, after 20 years, this decision stood out as being fundamental for the development of research on TB in the country.⁽¹⁾

In 2003, the Brazilian Tuberculosis Research Network (REDE-TB) became a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization concerned not only with assisting in the development of new drugs, new vaccines, new diagnostic tests, and new strategies to control TB, but also with validating these technological innovations prior to their commercialization in the country or incorporation into the Brazilian National Tuberculosis Program.

During the past 20 years, REDE-TB has contributed to 1) the development/training of health professionals, 2) improvements in the quality of research in Brazil, with the introduction of TB as a priority theme in health policies, health agendas, and research funding, and 3) the international recognition of the network's publications, its efforts to reduce the burden of the disease by synchronism, and the establishment of essential alliances among researchers, organized civil society, managers, healthcare providers, and students, among other key actors. Because of this original, strategic, and successful approach, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized the network as one of the most relevant achievements and recommended this strategy for other countries also affected by TB.⁽²⁾

In relation to the qualification and training of health professionals, one of the most significant successful initiatives was the development of the ICOHRTA AIDS/TB Project, funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), USA, a consortium involving three well-respected US Universities (Johns Hopkins, Cornell, and UC Berkeley) and the Brazilian counterparts. The project ran between

2002 and 2016 and trained over 2,000 healthcare providers in TB to conduct research in their respective workplaces.

Regarding the quality of research in Brazil, several publications have evidenced the impact of REDE-TB either in the increase in the number and impact of publications or in the networking among members, leveraging national and international collaborations.^(3,4) The network has helped improve the competitiveness of its members, resulting in collaborative funded projects. One example is the RePORT BRAZIL group, a consortium among members and non-members of REDE-TB, funded by the NIH and the Brazilian Ministry of Health, that was fundamental in creating and consolidating these research groups in Brazil and in helping achieve international competitiveness.⁽⁵⁾

In addition, it is well-recognized that the scientific production of REDE-TB has contributed to boost publications in Brazil. In 2019, Migliori et al.⁽⁶⁾ showed that Brazil was the country with the highest number of articles on tuberculosis, accounting for 208 (52.7%) of the total 395 articles from Latin America, and that the most cited authors were members of the REDE-TB group. The international renown of REDE-TB can also be noted with its participation in BRICS, where it is involved in the elaboration and operationalization of the tuberculosis research network in the countries associated with the BRICS block. Moreover, the WHO included REDE-TB in a case study for the construction of a global action framework for TB research in support of the third pillar of the WHO's end TB strategy, which was elaborated with the collaboration of its members.⁽²⁾

Furthermore, REDE-TB is an example of how the scientific collaboration model, much more than bringing people together, can be an intelligent strategy for the elimination of TB and other diseases. However, in Brazil, this is still a task for few, in the absence of funding or with unimpressive financing. It is essential that governments understand that investing in networks is the most promising way to fulfill the WHO's sustainable development goals.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

ELM, RAA, and JRLS contributed in the conception, planning, interpretation, and writing of this letter. All authors approved the final submitted version.

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