

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Tuberculosis is one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Diagnosing TB in an early stage and initiating appropriate treatment is one of the best ways to reduce the burden of tuberculosis. Finding, actively, separating, and treating (FAST) strategy helps to improve the early diagnosis of tuberculosis cases and prevent TB infection in hospital settings. This study assessed the feasibility of the FAST strategy for early diagnosis of tuberculosis in Nepal. This study explored the organizational, technical factors that need to implement FAST activities. This study also explores barriers and enablers that influence the proper implementation of the FAST strategy in Nepal.

Methods: A qualitative study was conducted from April 2019 to August 2019. Data was collected by using focused group discussion, key informant interviews, and client exit interviews. Patients, health care workers, hospital managers, district supervisors, province managers, and national level stakeholders were interviewed.

Results: Study identified that the current implementation setting and service delivery arrangement at hospitals is not well arranged as per requirement. The research findings showed that various organizational factors, technical and financial factors are essential for the proper implementation of the FAST approach in hospital settings. Hospital ownership, separate room, TB screening desk, and interdepartmental coordination are essential for proper implementation of FAST. Result reveals that unavailability of a separate room, limited capacity of GeneXpert machine, irregular supply of GeneXpert cartridge and insufficient manpower for screening and counseling in high patient flow hospitals. In the same way, freely available of TB services and laboratory equipment from government, multi-stakeholder engagement, regular supervision, monitoring, onsite coaching, dedicated staffs for screening and counseling are enablers for FAST.

Conclusion: FAST strategy is feasible to implement for early diagnosis of TB and infection prevention in healthcare settings however the identified factors should be managed to ensure effective program implementation. Hospital ownership is essential to institutionalization of the FAST approach.

Keywords: FAST strategy, feasibility study, tuberculosis, implementation research, Nepal