CORRESPONDENCE

mHealth to enhance TB referrals: challenge in scaling up. In reply

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We thank Dr Basu for his interest in our recent article¹ and the concerns he has raised.²

First, with regard to the Hawthorne bias, the study was aimed at determining the feasibility of using mHealth technology to increase the yield of presumptive tuberculosis (TB) case referrals among rural health care providers (RHCPs). The study included only those RHCPs who were motivated and willing to refer presumptive TB cases using the newer technology. The implementation of this technology required initial support to channel presumptive TB cases through this mechanism. The study was intended to look into the feasibility of implementation. The model ensured that the cases referred through this mechanism had feedback in optimal time, which was absent in the routine system. The RHCPs' behaviour did not change because they were supervised or observed, but rather because of the efficient referral feedback mechanism in place which they experienced over a period of time. We do not therefore sense any scope for a Hawthorne bias in this situation. The emphasis on RHCP sensitisation is not prioritised in the districts, as advocacy on this component from the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP) remains sub-optimal. Further, long-term studies may ascertain the sustainability on the usage of these technologies. The World Health Organization promotes the usage of digital technologies for the support of TB treatment and adherence.³

Second, with regard to the use of mobile phones in rural India, the penetration of android mobiles in rural areas is increasing, and the availability of internet

data at lower prices has further augmented use of mobiles. Mobile phone-based interventions are also being used effectively for diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases.^{4,5} The Government of India's initiative towards digital health has increased the adaptability of the usage of mobile phone services in the general population.⁶

We agree with Dr Basu that the involvement of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers at the community level is important, and all efforts are being made to involve all health care providers in the general health system. The newer digital interventions in health are bound to lower the disease burden in the long run.

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