

The COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the health systems created the need to effectively utilize the services of the small number of healthcare workers in the facilities. Clinic visits were reduced not only to ensure compliance with the national COVID-19 guidelines and protocols but also to ensure the safety of clients and frontline health workers while in the facilities. To achieve these, it became necessary to integrate the diagnosis of COVID-19 into the already-established Tuberculosis (TB) diagnostic platform.



With TB and COVID-19 having similar pathways and symptoms, the APIN laboratory program came up with the initiative to combine the screening of TB and COVID-19 at a single hospital visit for clients with suspicious symptoms, who also consented to be tested.

To operationalize this, APIN advocated to and collaborated with the facility leadership and management to set-up COVID-19 sample collection points within each facility and synergized with relevant institutions to develop and disseminate Standard Operating Practices (SOPs) and guidelines for TB and COVID-19 sample collection, management and safe practices. In addition, advocacy activities were carried out to gain the buy-in of relevant government agencies.

The introduction of the combined screening of TB and COVID-19 was initially met with resistance from clients. However, with continuous engagement, health education, and understanding of the

benefits of the new procedure, presumptive TB and COVID-19 clients gradually accepted the integrated diagnostic approach. From about 4% of the TB and COVID-19 presumptive clients accepting to participate in the screening for both TB and COVID-19 in May 2021, APIN recorded a remarkable increase to 98% by the month of September 2021.

The integrated diagnostic approach and the advocacy activities undertaken to generate support for this new initiative demonstrates the importance of stakeholder engagement and client/patient education as vital for the success of any new diagnostic method or initiative in health care delivery, especially as it relates to overcoming initial resistance. As clients began to understand and appreciate the benefits of the dual screening process, a reduction in the number of hospital visits was recorded, leading to a reduction in the risk of contracting other hospital acquired infections.

