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**N-4 THE IMPORTANCE OF PREVALENCE ON SETTING POSITIVE TEST THRESHOLDS AND ON TEST OUTCOMES: THE CASE OF TUBERCULOSIS**

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**Tanya G.K. Bentley, PhD**, Partnership for Health Analytic Research, LLC, Beverly Hills, CA, Antonio Catanzaro, MD, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA and Theodore Ganiats, MD, UCSD School of Medicine, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA

**Purpose:** Many factors affect the balance of true and false test results, and the interaction of two such factors – disease prevalence and the positive threshold – cause results to differ in high versus low-prevalence settings. We used an example of testing for latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI) to demonstrate the importance of disease prevalence in decisions regarding positive thresholds and test strategies.

**Method:** We compared number of true and false positive results when using two LTBI screening tests (in-tube QuantiFERON-TB Gold [QFT-IT] and T-SPOT.TB) in five countries of varying prevalence. We used estimates from test manufacturers to ascertain each test's positive thresholds, from published literature to determine sensitivity (81%, QFT-IT; 88%, T-SPOT.TB) and specificity (99%; 88%), and from the World Health Organization to estimate country-specific LTBI prevalence. We assumed sensitivity and specificity remained stable, with prevalence the only difference between settings.

**Result:** In switching from QFT-IT to T-SPOT.TB, the 7% increase in sensitivity impacted number of true positives more in high-prevalence settings, and the 11% decrease in specificity impacted number of false positives more in low-prevalence settings. Tradeoffs between increasing case identification and decreasing unnecessary treatments thus differed by orders of magnitude as prevalence varied, with lower-prevalence settings paying a “price” of accepting more false positives for each true positive gained. For example, the number of false positives per true positive gained in the United States, with 5% LTBI prevalence, was close to 10-fold higher than in Mexico with 29% prevalence, and 30-fold higher than in Ivory Coast with 55% prevalence. Lower-prevalence countries may therefore determine that a 7% increase in early case detection benefits too few people to justify the high burden of false positives, while higher-prevalence countries may decide that a greater increase in early detection is worth the increased treatment of false positives, especially in settings with limited access to care.

**Conclusion:** Sensitivity and specificity of tests such as QFT-IT and T-SPOT.TB differ in large part because of positive test thresholds, which are applied by test manufacturers equivalently – yet can result in largely different outcomes – between settings. To optimize test performance and improve outcomes, sensitivity and specificity should be set locally not globally, by incorporating prevalence in conjunction with other disease- and setting-specific factors when making testing decisions.

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