

# TB refuses to die in North

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## Rate of disease 125 times above national average

LAURIE SARKADI  
Journal Staff Writer

RAE, N.W.T.

The nurse spots Daniel playing on the dusty street, stops her truck and half-heartedly ensues the chase.

The wiley youth disappears, but eventually pokes his head out of the paint-chipped door to his house and surrenders to the persistent public health worker.

For today, anyways, he will take his tuberculosis pills.

Daniel's reluctance to accept the foul-tasting medicine is one possible reason why his Dogrib Dene community 100 km northwest of Yellowknife has not been able to shake the tuberculosis outbreak which began here in 1986.

Rae's rate of tuberculosis — about one case per 100 people — is 125 times higher than the national rate. Last year, 16 active new cases of tuberculosis were reported in the community of nearly 1,800.

Last October a tuberculosis epidemic inexplicably hit the Eastern Arctic community of Repulse Bay where a staggering 35 cases have been reported among the settlement's 450 residents.

Today there are 37 people in Rae taking medication to control the tuberculosis bacteria, first introduced to the territories about 300 years ago by European explorers.

Eleven of the cases are active and two are in isolation.

The question among some care givers is why these native communities continue to live with a curable disease that has been virtually eradicated in most of the Western world?

"If that was to have happened in Edmonton undoubtedly there would have been a great human outcry and people would have been working on it incessantly," says Dr. Geoff Taylor, an infectious disease specialist at University Hospital.

Please see Epidemic/A3

Laurie Sarkadi The Journal

Roseann Tsetta, 66, needs medication twice a week to control TB

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HELEN BRANDELL  
The Canadian Press



Larry Sargent, The Journal

Native health worker Madeline MacKenzie (left), Kate Koyne, R., and nurse Cori Jones

# EPIDEMIC

Continued from A1

Just last January Taylor says his unit had a young child from Rae nearly die from a tuberculous infection of his heart.

He says the territories should adopt a strategy similar to one mobilized last year for a tuberculous outbreak in the Alberta native community of Little Buffalo. A special tuberculosis control team of doctors and nurses identified possible carriers, provided treatment and the outbreak ended.

But Trudy Guichon, a tuberculosis consultant with the territorial department of infectious disease control, says there aren't enough health-care professionals in the North to duplicate such a program.

"I think the Department of Health is very willing to do everything it can to eliminate TB in the Northwest Territories," she says, "but one of the things that's really hampered us in the past has been manpower."

Last year the federal government transferred health responsibilities to the territorial government, causing an exodus of trained health-care workers in an already lean region.

Since then, more than \$1 million has been poured into tuberculosis treatment, lab testing and screening, while the government has recruited nurses and native liaison health workers to deal strictly with tuberculosis control, Guichon says.

While no one has been able to determine why the disease persists in Rae or Inuvik in Repulse Bay, Guichon says native settlements traditionally have higher tuberculosis rates.

"It's a social disease so you tend to see it among the underprivileged, unhealthy, or those who have a poor lifestyle. Up here in the Northwest Territories we have a lot of people who are native who fit into that category."

She says there are 11,000 people in the territories who at some point in their lives have been infected with tuberculosis.

When tubercle bacillus — a germ passed through the air by coughing, sneezing or speaking — is breathed into the lungs, it can either activate, lay dormant, or be consumed by antibodies.

If the germ activates, usually in unhealthy people, it can get the lung or spread to other organs causing death if untreated.

The crowded, poorly ventilated bungalows in Rae provide an excellent means for the germ to spread and a nightmare for nurses trying to trace possible carriers, says Louise Pillaire, senior nursing officer for the East MacKenzie region.

"You've got a (tuberculosis) positive person living in a house with maybe 10 other people, plus relatives visiting everybody and you've got to look for TB in all of these people," she says.

Even with a comprehensive contact tracing



Cathy Brybones comes from a large family, some of them TB carriers

program, Pillaire says it's difficult to convince carriers of the germ who don't feel ill that they must take tuberculosis pills for the next nine months to rid themselves of the bacteria.

Cori Jones, the tuberculosis nurse at the Rae Health Centre, and Madeline MacKenzie, a native liaison health worker, spend the bulk of their time chasing down children and adults alike to make sure they take their medicine.

"This way it's difficult for us, but at least we know they're getting their drugs," says the energetic Jones on the way to the school where 16 children require bi-weekly medicine.

"Most of them don't understand what TB is or why they have to take their pills."

By training more native workers, such as MacKenzie, to act as health representatives for their communities, officials hope to increase basic health education amongst Arctic native settlements.

The CBC got tv Tuesday — one a castor, the other a carant who is a bit quantity.

The first, PAIRO appointed chairm, while Gerard Veille the Treasury Board ad president.

Watson will ser-term; Veilleux, wh dired president rter given a seven-year t

The appointment, minister's office we: part greeted with as many people with: casting industry lxx the 47-year-old Veill

The new preside over Nov. 1, has no broadcasting but managerial experien Watson, 56, who l career both product in current affairs has often spoken of run the CBC.

He was ecstatic T had been given the c predicted morale an at the public broadc a turn for the better.

"I'm going in ther corporation buzz," he interview.

Veilleux said he is his lack of experie casting.

# Sales will c

LARRY WILSON  
The Canadian Press

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