Dear GP,

The face of TB in the South West is changing. Over half of cases are UK born, and an increasing proportion has social risk factors.

ALWAYS THINK TB
Investigation is simple - order a CXR, send sputum for TB culture and contact the TB team.

I am writing to you on behalf of the Bristol TB Service. Currently the South West is one of the worst performing regions in terms of delay between TB symptom onset and starting treatment.

Late presentation results in disease that is harder to treat as well as very complex contact tracing exercises.

We want to change this situation and to do that requires that we diagnose cases earlier. We are employing a number of strategies locally, but would particularly like to draw GP’s attention to changes in the type of typical cases we are seeing.

The demographic profile of TB patients is changing. While anyone can get TB, in Bristol, we are seeing increased numbers of TB cases in the UK born population. In particular we are seeing more UK born patients with social risk factors, such as homelessness, drug misuse and previous imprisonment. These patients tend to present later with more advanced infectious disease. Any delay in diagnosis further compounds the issues.

Often the most underserved populations have chaotic lifestyles that mean they present late and are erratic about attending for x-rays or providing samples. We are happy to work with you to support “pre diagnosis patients” you are concerned about, and will try to encourage patients to attend for x-rays and do sputum samples where possible.
Please telephone or e-mail the TB nurses for advice and information on referral.

Yours sincerely

Dr Sarah Mungall
Associate Specialist in Respiratory Medicine and TB Lead

cc. Mike Wade, Deputy Director of Health Protection, Public Health England South West
cc. Dr A. Leahy, Consultant Respiratory Physician, BRI
cc. Dr B Bovill, Consultant Infectious Diseases Physician, Southmead Hospital
cc. Dr J Calvert, Consultant Respiratory Physician, Southmead Hospital
cc  TB Nurses, Lawrence Hill Health Centre.