Accelerating Tuberculosis Vaccine Development: Insights from BCG Studies

Every year, tuberculosis (TB) claims more lives than any other infectious disease globally, a reality that persisted even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite setbacks, researchers remain optimistic about eradicating TB, emphasizing the need for swift advancements in vaccine development and public health strategies. A recent study introduces a promising method to expedite TB vaccine testing, potentially revolutionizing preventative measures against this persistent disease.

The Bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine, administered to newborns to mitigate TB risk, contains a weakened form of the TB bacteria. In a study involving 92 healthy adults who received varying BCG vaccine doses, researchers leveraged the immune response triggered by the BCG vaccine as a surrogate for TB exposure. By analyzing samples from the BCG injection site and blood, the team unveiled crucial insights into immune responses and gene expression changes upon encountering TB. This innovative approach opens new avenues for TB vaccine development, enabling early-stage screening of potential vaccines

An interesting revelation emerged from this study, shedding light on gender disparities in TB susceptibility. Researchers observed distinct immune responses in men and women following

the BCG challenge, mirroring observations in TB patients.

The novel BCG-based model not only accelerates TB vaccine assessment but also serves as a gateway to unravelling the complexities of gender-based immune response variations. This breakthrough not only propels TB vaccine development but also offers a potential key to understanding differential immunity levels between men and women.

Journal article: Blazevic, A., 2023. Phase 1 Open-Label Dose Escalation Trial for the Development of a Human Bacillus Calmette-Guérin Challenge Model for Assessment of Tuberculosis Immunity In Vivo. *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*.

Summary by Stefan Botha