**Historical View of Tuberculosis**

For thousands of years, *tuberculosis* (TB) has afflicted humans. Definitive evidence of tuberculosis (TB) has been found in the spines of Egyptian mummies dating from 5000 B.C. In 460 B.C, Hippocrates wrote of TB (then referred to as phthisis or consumption), citing it as the most prevalent disease and one that killed almost everyone it infected. By the 1600s TB had made its way to Europe and was called the white plague. TB was clearly evident in the literature of the time in the writings of John Bunyan in *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, John Keats in the *Ode to a Nightingale*, and Charles Dickens in *Nicholas Nickleby*. During this time, TB was so common, and so little was known about it, death was accepted as inevitable.

In 1720, English physician Benjamin Marten hypothesized TB could be caused by "wonderfully minute living creatures." He further surmised, "It may be therefore very likely that by an [sic] habitual lying in the same bed with a consumptive patient, constantly eating and drinking with him, or by very frequently conversing so nearly as to draw in part of the breath he emits from the lungs, a consumption may be caught by a sound person. I imagine that slightly conversing with consumptive patients is seldom or never sufficient to catch the disease."

In *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, by Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau who himself had recovered from TB.

In 1882, these minute creatures were finally seen by Dr. Robert Koch, who had discovered a staining technique that identified the assaulting microbe. *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* had at last been identified. Treatment, however remained unchanged and at its best was one of good nutrition, rest, fresh air and social isolation in sanatoriums like the “little red” cottage pictured below.

"Little Red” the first TB sanatorium in the United States was opened in 1884, by Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau who himself had recovered from TB.

In 1943, Dr. Selman Wakesman discovered streptomycin, the first antibiotic to treat TB. This was followed by a rapid succession of anti-TB drugs that were so effective almost all sanatoriums closed for good in the 1960s. TB rates dropped steadily until the 1980s, at which time they began to increase slightly. This increase has been attributed to the rise in HIV infection, immigration and the emergence of multi-drug resistant TB.

**Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**
[http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/tb/notes/TBN_1_00/TBN2000Ruggiero.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/tb/notes/TBN_1_00/TBN2000Ruggiero.htm)