Tuesday, March 24 marked World TB Day 2015. Each March 24 commemorates the day in 1882 when Robert Koch astounded the scientific community by announcing that he had discovered the cause of tuberculosis, the TB bacillus. Accordingly, on March 20, 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) titled “Tuberculosis Trends – United States, 2014.” The lead author was East Tennessee State University College of Public Health alumna Dr. Colleen Scott.

According to Dr. Scott, preliminary data from 2014 national TB surveillance show that TB control is working with a continued drop in the number of TB cases and in the rate of new infections. However, this data does suggest that progress is slowing, reinforcing the challenges in efforts to eliminate TB. Dr. Scott states, “We also need to remember that while TB disease may be declining, it strikes with a heavy blow to certain communities and vulnerable populations. It is important for everyone to remember that TB exposures can and do occur everywhere – in schools, at work, at home; anywhere people are in close contact with one another.”

As an Epidemic Intelligence Service officer, Dr. Scott is required to write and submit, as the primary author, a concise public health update communicating timely information. For completing this program requirement, she is assigned to the Division of TB Elimination – a division dedicated to analyzing and reporting preliminary TB data for the prior year in time for World TB Day. The division receives preliminary state data early in the year. They then collate and analyze the data, and then write a comprehensive report. Dr. Scott says, “I had a wonderful team of colleagues helping me to accomplish this data coordination/cleaning/analyzing and writing feat to produce a solid report of TB within the US in 2014.”

Colleen Scott received a Doctor of Public Health degree from East Tennessee State University in May 2014. She then began a two-year post-doctoral fellowship with the Epidemic Intelligence Service of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta.

The Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) series is prepared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Often called “the voice of CDC,” the MMWR series is the agency’s primary vehicle for scientific publication of timely, reliable, authoritative, accurate, objective, and useful public health information and recommendations. MMWR readership predominantly consists of physicians, nurses, public health practitioners, epidemiologists and other scientists, researchers, educators, and laboratorians. The data in the weekly MMWR are provisional, based on weekly reports to CDC by state health departments.