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The development of the Counsellor Toolkit: a tool for guidance during HTS Counselling Sessions in a Community Based Counselling and Testing program

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BACKGROUND

- South Africa's high HIV prevalence (20.6% in adults) and incidence of 1.00 and 1.51 among women aged 15-24 years as well as high-burden key population groups who are hard to reach with facility HIV testing has prompted the use of community-based HIV counselling and testing (CBCT) methods to increase coverage.
- When HIV testing takes place in a community-based setting, there is a need for a structured quality assurance program that ensures HTS sessions are conducted as conceptualized and executed in a standardized way across counsellors and sites.
- To establish this quality standard and procedural adherence a counsellor toolkit was developed and implemented.
- This paper describes the process of developing a Counsellor Toolkit that attempts to guide a standardised implementation of community-based HIV counselling and testing (CBCT).

METHODS

Design: A needs assessment was conducted to establish the kind of information that should be made available to counsellors.

Data collection: Key informant interviews with ten experienced counsellors, three linkage tracers and a CBCT program manager were conducted in Nkangala district during the period of January – March 2018. Additional data were collected through desktop reviews, field observations and management meetings to ensure that selected information for the toolkit was relevant and up to date.

Data Analysis: All data was analysed using thematic content analysis to establish the different elements for the toolkit. All HIV testing algorithms and job aids were aligned to the South African National HIV and AIDS policy. The initial draft was circulated amongst key stakeholders for comments after which the final toolkit was developed.

RESULTS

- The resulting toolkit is a comprehensive file that contains all required information for an HTS counsellor that works in a community-based setting. The following sections have been included: Introduction, Requirements, Training, Program information, Modalities, Quality Assurance, Job Aids, HIV Rapid Testing Algorithm, HTS Protocols, Basic HIV & AIDS information, Client rights, Facts and Monitoring and Evaluation.
- The toolkit is designed in colourful font with visual aids that limit wordy details but concentrates on graphics to provide guidance.
- The toolkit provides a step-by-step process of conducting HIV testing in a community using easy-to-understand language. It details processes that, when followed will maintain accurate, recommended and ethical HIV testing, documentation, test kits supplies storage and care processes in the community as in a facility.



CONCLUSION

- The toolkit development process has led to an evidence based high quality toolkit that can be used by HTS counsellors and their supervisors in the field.
- It also serves as a training guide as all required training elements are presented in the tool.
- To keep the tool up to date, constant revision needs to take place. It is recommended to do further research on the impact and compliance in the field.

Keywords

Quality Assurance, HIV Testing, Community Based, Counsellor Toolkit

