Routine HIV Testing and Counseling among Sexually Transmitted Infections

Experience from the Lighthouse at Bwaila Hospital

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Background

• High HIV prevalence among sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) patients in Malawi
  - 32% among all STI patients
  - 61% in genital ulcer disease patients

• Although STIs are known to facilitate HIV acquisition and transmission, there is low uptake of HIV testing counseling (HTC) services among STI patients in Malawi

• At Bwaila STI unit, only 43% of patients had HIV status ascertained by June 2009
  - Patients were referred to another site for HIV testing services

• To address the gap, Lighthouse integrated HIV testing Counseling services within STI clinic

Objectives

To increase HIV testing and counseling uptake among STI patients

Methods

• All STI patients were sensitized on benefits of HTC using a standard group pre-test education protocol
• All STI patients went through individual testing counseling using opt-out strategy
• HIV positive patients were linked to HIV care at Martin Preuss centre

Results

Between June 2009 and June 2010
9,232 patients registered
  - 9,134 (99%) knew their HIV status
  - 8,354 (90%) were tested for the first time
  - Of those who tested for the first time, 1,690 (20%) tested positive
  - 7,868 (94%) were tested with a partner
Of the 2,470 clients who were HIV positive (new positive and already positive),
1,987 (80%) were referred to ART clinic

Conclusions

• Integration of HTC services in the management of STI patients has led to high ascertainment of HIV status
• Although STI guidelines include HIV testing and counseling in case management, there are still operational challenges including infrastructure and personnel
• Need to intensify HTC services in all STI management