

Elzette Rousseau

Mobile Primary Healthcare: Taking healthcare out of facilities for effective HIV prevention and care



ABSTRACT: While South Africa has one of the largest ART programs globally it is estimated that approximately 59% of adults are not receiving treatment¹. HIV and other chronic diseases are relatively inexpensive to manage when diagnosed early, however, the majority of people living in high disease burden areas do not access healthcare services due to perceived or actual barriers of accessibility, overburdened health systems, lack of confidentiality and stigma. Mobile clinics with point-of-care (POC) diagnostics may be a potential solution for making healthcare more accessible in communities. In 2013, HIV prevalence in South Africa was estimated at 5.26million of which only 44.8% knew their HIV status²³. The Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation's Tutu Tester (TT) is a mobile clinic service taking healthcare out of facilities and into under-resourced communities. Annually over 7000 clients on the TT can test for HIV, STI's, TB, and screen for high blood pressure, diabetes, cervical cancer and obesity and receive their results within 20 minutes. Analysis has revealed that mobile HIV testing is very cost-effective. Compared to clinics and hospitals, mobile service clients were less likely to be HIV positive and those infected presented with earlier disease before the onset of HIV-related symptoms. Seventy-five per cent (75%) of HIV-infected individuals on the TT had a CD4 count higher than 350 cell/ μ l compared to 48% and 32% at the clinic and hospital. Innovative biometric identification system using finger prints provide an anonymous system and integrity for clients. The TT was more likely to serve and empower high-risk and difficult to reach populations (young people and men). We propose that this shift in healthcare out of facilities and into communities could facilitate early diagnosis of HIV, which is seen as the gateway to effective prevention and treatment.

Keywords: HIV prevention; high risk populations; hard-to-reach communities; mobile clinic; access to healthcare

¹ UNAIDS (2013). "Access to Antiretroviral therapy in Africa: Status report on progress towards the 2015 targets." Available at: http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/unaidspublication/2013/20131219_AccessARTAfricaStatusReportProgressTowards2015Targets_en.pdf

² Statistics South Africa. Mid year population estimates 2013. Accessed 31/03/2014. Available at: <http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022013.pdf>

³ Van der Linde, I. (2013). "HIV/AIDS in South Africa: At last the glass is half full". Accessed on 31/03/2014. Available at: <http://www.hsrb.ac.za/en/media-briefs/hiv-aids-stis-and-tb/plenary-session-3-20-june-2013-hiv-aids-in-south-africa-at-last-the-glass-is-half-full>

Presenter: Miss Elzette Rousseau
Pepfar/USAID Fellow, Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation

Presentation's connection to themes of the conference:

The anonymous testing service provides **integrity** to clients leading to more men and young people getting tested. With more easily accessible and friendly healthcare services and health education, clients are **empowered** to be responsible for their personal health and the lack of stigma with this service is allowing clients the **freedom** to bring their friends, family and partners without prejudice.

Explanation of terms:

- ART - Anti-retroviral therapy (ART) consist of a combination of treatments/drugs to suppress the HIV virus and stop the progression of the HIV disease.
- Biometric - An electronic system to identify clients by means of a fingerprint scan.
- CD4 - CD4 cells are a type of white blood cells that help fight infections. A CD4 count indicates the stage of HIV or AIDS in a patient.
- HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- POC - Point-of-care (POC) testing allows for a client to receive their test results rapidly while they are still at the place of healthcare, whether it is a mobile clinic or physician's office.
- TB - Tuberculosis is a bacterial infection that affects the lungs of a person and can be fatal if not treated.
- STI - Sexually transmitted infections including chlamydia, herpes, syphilis, etc.
- Stigma - negative, disgraceful and unfair beliefs associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person