

STRENGTHENING UGANDA'S SYSTEMS FOR TREATING AIDS NATIONALLY

~ SUCCESS STORY ~

Improving Client Appointment-keeping at Hoima Regional Referral Hospital (RRH)

Effective HIV care requires clients to adhere to regular appointments for drug refills, clinical and laboratory, as well as ART adherence monitoring. But all too frequently, clients fail to observe their scheduled appointments, often due to the time, cost and inconvenience of travelling to and waiting at the clinic. Furthermore, service provider teams often have difficulties following up clients because of inaccuracies in client contact information captured at registration. This makes it hard to determine if clients who do not keep appointments have, on their own, transferred to another healthcare facility or truly defaulted on treatment. Clients who default on treatment are at risk of developing treatment failure, frequently leading to drug resistance and loss of future treatment options.

In July 2013, through a performance review exercise, the Hoima RRH ART Clinic team found out that only 64% of the clinic's total clients returned for routine scheduled clinical reviews, drug refills, CD4 testing and counselling. This was below the recommended Uganda Ministry of Health target of 100%. The team decided to close this gap by implementing a quality improvement (QI) project focused on increasing the rate of client appointment-keeping.

Following a problem analysis exercise, various interventions were identified and implemented (beginning July 2013) to close the identified gap:

- ◆ Harmonising appointments for clients from the same family and assigning them the same return dates to reduce transport costs and encourage family support as well
- ◆ Opening the clinic earlier each day and ensuring that client files are transferred from triage, consultation or counsellors' rooms to the pharmacy on behalf of clients to reduce movement and congestion, which should ultimately reduce client waiting time.
- ◆ Updating client contact information, including information for family members or other treatment supporters.

Other strategies included referring clients who live far from Hoima RRH to nearby healthcare facilities; establishing a phlebotomy section at the ART Clinic for easy collection of



Clients at the Hoima RRH ART Clinic wait to see clinicians.

CD4 samples; educating and counselling clients further about the importance of appointment-keeping during general and individual health education sessions; and issuing two-month supplies of ARV drugs to stable clients.

“During health education sessions, we encourage clients who have family members attending the same clinic to share this information with clinicians so that the clients can be assigned appointments on the same day.”

Prisca Nyamaizi, Clinical Officer at Hoima's ART Clinic

“I am happy that the clinic changed me from receiving one-month to two-month drug supplies. I have been struggling to raise money for transport to come here every month, but now I will comfortably save money to bring me to the clinic every two months.”

Expressed by a client

By end of June 2014, the percentage of clients honouring scheduled appointments had improved to 95%. The interventions also reduced client waiting time within the clinic; by 3:00pm each day, on average, all clinical consultations are completed, including drug dispensing from the pharmacy—two hours earlier than in the past.

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