



U.S. Agency for
International
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Bureau for
Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

Four-Year Study Leads to Expanded Services for Indians With HIV/AIDS

WHEN SHARMILA (not her real name) discovered she was HIV-positive, she thought her days were numbered. The 28-year-old mother of two had barely absorbed the news that her husband was infected with HIV when she learned her own test results. Depression and fear overwhelmed Sharmila as she watched her husband grow weak with illness.

Within weeks, however, Sharmila gathered enough strength to seek help. Soon she began counseling to find answers to the many questions that preoccupied her, including, “What is HIV,” and “How long can I expect to live?” Today, Sharmila points to those counseling sessions as a turning point: “Information empowers, and I feel so relieved that I have people to talk to.”

For the past two years, Sharmila has been a client of the Y.R. Gaitonde Centre for AIDS Research and Education (YRG CARE), an Indian nongovernmental organization that provides prevention, care, treatment, and support services to more than 2,500 people living with HIV/AIDS and their families. Founded in 1993 in the city of Chennai, YRG CARE has become a widely recognized model of care for its patient-centered approach, its comprehensive service portfolio, its commitment to client and community education, and its respect for client privacy.

YRG CARE is also the site of a four-year research project supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by the Population Council Horizons Program and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, to examine the role that integrated care and support play in improving the lives of people with HIV/AIDS. The study measures clients’ quality of life, perceived needs, and satisfaction with services, as well as financial indicators such as clients’ willingness to pay for services, and the impact of treatment costs on household budgets.

Data from the study, which show high levels of client satisfaction and high comfort levels with YRG CARE staff, are currently being used to replicate similar services at four new sites across southern India—in Calicut, Chirala, Mysore, and Pondicherry. Scaling up successful HIV/AIDS services to reach more clients is critically important in a country like India, which has millions of HIV-positive people yet few high-quality, confidential care and support programs. In fact, dozens of the center’s clients come from hundreds of miles away because they fear local discovery of their HIV status.

The USAID project provides training in clinical services, psychosocial services, and organizational development to partners at the four new sites, but emphasizes YRG CARE’s core

“The doctor and counselor encouraged me to think of myself as normal ... It has given me confidence.”

— A YRG CARE client,
Chennai, India



Photo courtesy of Chris Castle

Nutrition counselor Suneeta Sayhayam with a client. The study data show high levels of client satisfaction with nutrition counseling at YRG CARE.

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values: patient-centered care, respect for client dignity and confidentiality, and the involvement of families and communities.

This model of care is a new experience for Indians living with HIV/AIDS, and those who have access to it are grateful. As one client put it: "The counselor ... never turned me away for questioning. The doctor and counselor encouraged me to think of myself as normal, and the doctor reassured me that if anything happens he is there to take care of it. It has given me confidence."

India, October 2003