



U.S. Agency for
International
Development

Bureau for
Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

Strengthening the Voluntary Counseling and Testing Commodities Supply System in Zambia

HOW DOES THE COMMODITIES SUPPLY system affect the success of a voluntary counseling and testing program?

To respond to its growing HIV epidemic, the Zambian government implemented voluntary counseling and testing as a vital activity to prevent and control HIV/AIDS and has established more than 100 voluntary counseling and testing sites around the country. Rapid HIV test kits at the sites allow for same-day results; confidential counseling and referrals for ongoing care and support are provided following the test, all essential services for those seeking to know their HIV status.

The commodities essential for HIV testing and referral services are critical for building and maintaining a demand for voluntary counseling and testing. Thus, short supplies or lack of HIV/AIDS-related commodities have a profound effect on the success of voluntary counseling and testing programs. When commodities needed to perform voluntary counseling and testing services, such as HIV test kits, are unavailable, the reputation of the program is jeopardized.

If staff do not have the supplies necessary to do their jobs, they lose enthusiasm and motivation, especially when they repeatedly have to turn people away. When gloves and needle disposal equipment are unavailable, fears regarding infection control increase, possibly intensifying stigma at the site. More importantly, Zambians who must travel long distances from rural areas to the voluntary counseling and testing sites may not make the long journey again if they are asked to come back because rapid HIV test kits are unavailable. The opportunity to learn their status and get referrals for ongoing care for them and their families may be missed forever.

An assessment of the Zambian pharmaceutical supply system found that because of a lack of coordination, voluntary counseling and testing sites used six different test kits. Some used

donated test kits that are not in the national HIV testing protocol or that are inappropriate for the local situation. Inaccurate estimates of the number of kits needed and uncoordinated purchasing resulted in wasted supplies, delayed orders, and higher costs to the government.

In response to these issues, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) tasked Management Sciences for Health with the Rational Pharmaceutical Management (RPM) Plus Program. Together with Family Health International, Management Sciences for Health developed *Commodity Management in VCT Programs: A Planning Guide*. This guide provides



Photo credit: Management Sciences for Health

A nurse takes a blood sample at a voluntary counseling and testing center. Frequent stock-outs of HIV test kits or other essential commodities can deter clients from seeking testing at their local facility.

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practical commodity-management information for establishing, managing, and scaling-up voluntary counseling and testing programs, including step-by-step recommendations and directions on how to calculate commodity orders. The planning guide helps strengthen voluntary counseling and testing supply systems, making these services available to those who need them.

The Zambian government used the concepts and strategies in the planning guide to strengthen the Zambian voluntary counseling and testing program, which had been constrained by limited information and lack of a commodity management system. Strategies implemented included adopting a new nationwide testing protocol, centralizing commodity needs, and incorporating the voluntary counseling and testing supply system into the national supply system. Using the planning guide as a resource, trainers trained colleagues in 72 districts, and a new voluntary counseling and testing information and commodity management system was rolled out in July 2003.

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids

<http://www.msh.org>

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