

Track/Category: D4- Operations and Implementation Research

Title: Using cell phones to track patients lost-to-follow up (LTFU): The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF)'s experience in Cote d'Ivoire

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Background: The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation has supported the Cote d'Ivoire Ministry of Health since 2004 to expand HIV prevention, care and treatment. By September 30, 2010, EGPAF was supporting 139 HIV care and treatment sites. EGPAF Cote d'Ivoire program's 2009 annual program report showed a 56.9% antiretroviral therapy (ART) patient retention rate. Loss to follow-up (LTFU) accounted for 32% of cumulative patient attrition. To address patient treatment outcome challenges linked to LTFU, EGPAF piloted a patient tracking system using cell phones.

Methods: EGPAF Cote d'Ivoire purchased and distributed cell phones to health-care providers and lay community counselors at 130 sites (96 of the sites had EGPAF-supported community counselors). Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were developed for the use of the cell phones to track patient LTFU. Orientation workshops were held for health district managers, health facility managers, and health-care providers. The role of lay community counselors was outlined and discussed with partner community NGOs to ensure proper supervision of their staff. Data were collected and analyzed from a 12-site sample to document the pilot. LTFU patients with listed phone numbers were prioritized and contacted. Patients who were reached were invited to return for support. All returning patients were offered adherence counseling with a regular schedule of home visits.

Results: Between July and October 2010, a total of 4,221 patients had exited the treatment program. Of the 1,859 patients with cell phone contacts, 1,590 (85.5%) were called. Sixty-five percent (1,038) of those called were reached. Seventy-seven patients (4.8%) were transferred, 131 (8.2%) were reported dead. Thirty-one percent of patients (491) promised to return and 201 of patients reached by phone (12.6%) were successfully re-integrated back into care.

Conclusion: Phone calls are a helpful method to follow-up on patients who have exited the ART program and patients can then be reintegrated into care.