

Title: Experiences of how patients are involved in tracking fellow patients back to HIV chronic care at a health centre III in Uganda.

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Background

Health systems originally designed for acute conditions need to adjust and adapt approaches to address health challenges due to chronic conditions. The intervention aimed at developing innovations involving patients to minimize patient loss to follow-up in HIV care and improve adherence to antiretroviral therapy.

Method

The USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) Project, working with the Ministry of Health, supported 3 health facilities in Mityana District to improve HIV chronic care through training in quality improvement and monthly on-site coaching. Facility teams gathered in October 2013 to share experiences on how they identified gaps affecting attainment of goals like patient retention and developed and implemented changes.

The team at the health center III decided to address loss to follow-up (patients missing their scheduled clinic visits for three consecutive months) by holding a quality improvement meeting with four expert patients in attendance. After the meeting, expert patients started reviewing charts of all the 420 patients that have ever enrolled in treatment. Charts for patients that were lost to follow-up were sorted out for follow-up with the expert patients by either visiting them at home or telephoning them.

Results

Of the 420 charts reviewed in September 2013, 25% (103) belonged to patients who had been lost to follow-up. While four of these had died and three had self-transferred to other facilities, 96 were in the village receiving no treatment at all. With the involvement of the expert patients 53 (55%) of the 96 patients had returned to the HIV clinic by the end of December 2013. Expert patients continue to follow up the rest to encourage their return to care.

Conclusion

Patients are an untapped resource with expertise that when well utilized, bridges health care system gaps like staffing shortages, in low-resource settings.

Words: 294