Abstract category:
E63 Community care

Title:
Improving access to HIV testing and other basic health services in rural areas of Malawi through mobile clinics

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Text:
Issues: Malawi struggles to provide health care to citizens living in remote rural areas where villages may be 15 km or more from health centers that provide HIV testing and other basic services.

Description: In October of 2008 Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA) launched two mobile clinics funded by the Elizabeth Taylor HIV/AIDS Foundation in high HIV prevalence rural areas of Mulanje District. Working closely with the District Health Office, GAIA had identified two remote areas and conducted a needs assessment which revealed high rates of illiteracy and poor infrastructure. Two 4-wheel drive vehicles were purchased and outfitted. Each is staffed with a Clinical Officer, a Registered Nurse, nurse aide, and driver and returns to the same village each day of the week to allow for predictability. The clinic is set up in a community building such as a church or school. Each vehicle has a bench and can provide emergency transportation to the district hospital. Services are similar to those provided by government health centers and include prenatal care and prevention of mother-to-child transmission, family planning, acute illness diagnosis and treatment (malaria and pneumonia), and VDRL and HIV counseling and testing. They are provided free of charge. In 2009, the two clinics had a total of 41,533 client visits; 2583 people were tested for HIV and 555 (21%) were found HIV+.

Lessons learned: Integrated basic health services provided by mobile clinics can fill an important gap and provide an excellent platform for HIV testing. Using an integrated primary health care model helps diminish HIV stigma and provide services across the lifespan.

Next steps: GAIA will deploy a third clinic this year to another under-resourced area and is collecting data to show how the clinics provide additive value to a stressed rural health system.

Keywords:
1. HIV testing
2. Rural health services
3. Mobile Clinics
4. Integrated health care

Country of research:
Malawi