

Improving HIV peer counseling in Papua New Guinea

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Background/Purpose:

Peer counselling has long been recognised as an important component in the management of HIV. However, little has changed over the past decade to support, enhance or strengthen this activity. Over the past 2 years as part of the Sexual Reproductive Health Improvement Project (SRHIP) we have worked with a group of 8 peer counsellors in Papua New Guinea to develop a toolkit that supports the transfer of knowledge and information from peer counsellor to client. As a result HIV clients are better able to make informed decisions about their own health and life style choices.

Approach:

A series of focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KII) were conducted with peer counsellors, newly diagnosed clients and healthcare workers to identify relevant topics. This data was then used to develop key messages for each topic, and format these messages into a series of cards that are then used by the peer counsellor to support the counselling activity. A field trial was conducted and refinements made based on feedback to produce a final versions of the toolkit.

Outcomes/Impact:

As 30th June 2020: 5401 people have attended counselling with the toolkit (M-1815, F-3586), 892 were newly diagnosed, 4582 were returning clients and 368 were previously lost to follow-up. In addition 8311 attended group education using the toolkit. The National Department of Health, PNG has expressed interest in rolling the toolkit out nationally.

Innovation and Significance:

The toolkit and training ensures that peer counsellors provide consistent and factually correct information and learn how to communicate this to their clients effectively. As a result clients are more likely to return for follow-up counselling & are less likely to be LTFU. Peer counsellors are being recognised by clinic staff as partners in the HIV response, and people living with HIV are reporting that the information they now receive allows them to make informed decisions about how to live with and manage their disease.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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