An Assessment of Decentralization of Antiretroviral Therapy in Myanmar

INTRODUCTION

ART is being rapidly scaled up in Myanmar, led by National AIDS Programme (NAP) and supported by many partners.

Decentralization of HIV care and treatment to township and peripheral levels brings services closer to where those in need reside (Fig. 1).

ART decentralization assessment conducted to 13 decentralized ART sites in March 2015 by a joint team of national and international experts.

METHODOLOGY

The decentralized (DC) ART site staff was interviewed using an assessment questionnaire to understand the operations, capacity and management of the sites;

Focus group discussions were organized with the site director, partners, and/or the representatives of People Living with HIV (PLHIV) networks and NGOs, to understand issues related to successes, challenges, and proposed actions;

Short patient interviews were conducted with 3-5 PLHIV who were receiving services from the respective site to understand their perception of quality and satisfaction with services.

RESULTS

Planning, coordination and partnership: Initiated at central and regional levels, but site level planning has not routinely occurred in some sites.

Human Resource and case load: In most of the sites, the staff time of doctors, nurses, lab technicians and pharmacists/compounder are shared with other services in the hospital/site. The current case load in DC sites appeared manageable with most DC sites receiving on average 17 patients per week with very few referred back to ART centers in the previous 6 months to date (Fig. 2).

Service provision and perceived quality: Most of the essential services of HIV testing and counselling, TB screening and treatment, ART side effects and opportunistic infection (OI) management, PMTCT and STI services were available on site or through referral. Patients reported satisfaction with services received from the health providers in the DC sites, but with suggestions for improvements.

Laboratory: HIV screening and confirmation tests, CDM testing, TB diagnosis and GeneXpert are available on site or through referral in most of the sites. Viral load (VL) and blood spot tests (DBS) for early infant diagnosis (EID) are not currently available in most of the sites. All lab services are free of charge.

Infrastructural and pharmaceuticals: Rooms for patient reception, exam, blood draw and lab were reported as insufficient in a number of sites. In some sites, laboratory spaces were small with varying degrees of cleanliness. Several sites reported that shortage of ARVs were managed through borrowing from ART centers and made patient appointment with short interval for next visit to pick up more ARVs.

Supervision and mentoring, monitoring and reporting: There was no clear description of mentoring or ongoing support from the main referring ART center, and despite quarterly visits by the AIDS/STD team or team leader, documentation with joint planning for quality improvement was not performed.

Assessment of the performance of the DC site: Currently not in place, especially for assessing cascade of services; Paper based patients documentation with joint planning for quality improvement was not performed.

CONCLUSION

Initial success has been achieved in a number of the ART decentralized sites with scale up of HIV service provision and staff capacity in Myanmar.

Ongoing efforts are needed to strengthen planning, coordination, partnerships, monitoring and supervision, and expand key services of HIV identification, ART initiation, retention and virologic suppression.

Authors:
Thu Aung Hsan2; Ammassari S5, Andreeva V7; Murphy E5; Pa Pa Win Htin7; Lin Htet8; Thin Thin Thwe8; Warren D9; Chun H10.

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