

Bringing expert HIV management advice to clinicians on the frontlines: A cross-sectional analysis of queries received by the Right to Care HIV/TB Helpline

JB Turner¹, C Jackson¹, I Engelbrecht¹, L Levin¹

1. Right to Care, Johannesburg, South Africa;

Background:

In South Africa, the rapid advancement of HIV management results in clinicians requiring ongoing support. Right to Care NGO has run an HIV helpline for over 15 years. It allows six HIV/TB specialists to provide immediate guidance to clinicians while they see patients, and to capture details of the calls in an electronic database. This provides surveillance of the particular aspects of HIV management for which clinicians require additional support, and can help to improve future guidelines, trainings and job-aids.

Methods:

A cross-sectional analysis was performed on helpline records from December 2021 to November 2022. Proportions of the type of query, caller and facility were calculated, and distribution of calls analysed by province and facility.

Results:

A total of 3046 helpline calls were received, originating from all provinces of South Africa. The number of calls per month increased from roughly 120 per month at the beginning of the year to over 300 calls per month later in the year, creating an average of 254 calls per month. 74% of calls came from clinics and 22% from hospitals, while 28% of callers were doctors and 64% were nurses. The most common queries received were regarding treatment failure (43%), of which 54% were on protease inhibitors, 27% non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors, and 18% on dolutegravir. The next most common queries included abnormal kidney function (12%), transitioning to dolutegravir (11%), ARV stockouts (10%), TB (6%), infant prophylaxis (5%), ART simplification (5%), ART initiation (5%), adverse events (4%), interpretation of blood results (4%), drug interactions (4%), hepatitis B (2%), neonatal ART (2%), abnormal liver function (1%) and post exposure prophylaxis (1%).

Conclusion:

The helpline is a successful method of providing expert HIV guidance to clinicians on the frontlines, as well as monitoring particular aspects of HIV management for which clinicians require additional support.

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