

Embracing Technology: Stable Chronic ART Patients in a Rural District in Mpumalanga Province of South Africa opt for Collect & Go Smart lockers as their preferred External Pick-Up Point

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Background: The Central Chronic Medicines Dispensing and Distribution (CCMDD) is a program of the National Department of Health (NDoH) that provides access to stable patients to collect their repeat chronic medications at approved, more convenient site. During the COVID pandemic, there was greater need for medicine delivery methods that are reliable and guaranteed physical distancing

Method: Right To Care (RTC), through its subsidiary Right ePharmacy (ReP), with funding from the USAID, installed Collect&Go™ smart lockers, in September 2020, at 11 sites in Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga Province. This high-tech solution automates contactless, parcel collection by users as well as tracks parcel collection real time.

Results: Data from the 11 sites show that from September 2020 till January 2023, there have been 123 845 total collections while 23159 clients were enrolled, of these 47% are between 40-59 years, 36% between 25-39 years, 11% are >60 years and 3.7% between 15-24 years. Successful collection rate, a proxy for retention in care, was excellent at 95%. There is significant association between medicine pick up compliance and type of pick-up point ($p < 0.001$), with patients enrolled on the lockers almost twice as likely to collect their medication on time compared to those enrolled at facility pick up point (OR 1.86; 95% CI 1.77- 1.95). Comparing total number of prescriptions processed per annum between Dec 2020 and Dec 2022, while there was a 141% increase for the lockers, the facilities as pick up point and other Corporate Pharmacies had aggregate 85% and 3.4% decrease respectively.

Conclusion: Collect & Go™ smart lockers are highly effective and easily scalable, last mile medicine delivery method. It is even more useful where options are limited. Older patients, and patients in rural settings can embrace technology, if it serves them well. The lockers could improve ART retention in rural areas.