

HIV AND NEUROPSYCHIATRY UNIT
CHRIS HANI BARAGWANATH HOSPITAL

Disease Area Alignment

HIV/AIDS in Africa

Grant Request

**R710, 600 over one year
(Dec 2008– Dec 2009)**

Overview of the project

Project Name: LUTHANDO (LOVE) to improve the quality of life of people with mental illness through the implementation of community focused HIV/AIDS interventions

Duration: December 2008 – December, 2009

Location: Soweto, Gauteng , South Africa

Beneficiaries: People living with HIV and mental illnesses and their families

Background and Need

Given the relatively high prevalence of HIV/AIDS within the general population, there are a proportion of infected persons, with mental illness, who are unaware of their HIV status. Knowledge of HIV status, with appropriate counselling may mean that these individuals can change risk behaviour and 'live positively' to protect their quality of life and that of their family. . There is also a need for primary prevention to ensure that the uninfected segment of the mentally ill population protect themselves. Though there is some evidence of increased knowledge, there is still a need to encourage behaviour change especially in the young adult population.

Further, there is a need for this population group to access healthcare. Anti-retroviral therapy (ARV) has been largely inaccessible to mentally ill people living with HIV/AIDS due to economic, structural, and geographical factors. However, recent developments in national policy, ART availability, standardization and simplification of drug regimes and laboratory tests have made the introduction of ART a distinct reality. However, the availability of ART to PLWHA and mental illness is still not a reality, because of fears of non adherence. Current healthcare provisions are inadequate and to some extent stigmatising. It is essential that care and treatment for PLWHA and mental illness is integrated into the existing healthcare structures and providing appropriate support and care. The devastating effects of HIV on cognitive functioning, the nature of the mental illness and socio-environmental issues impact on compliance and follow up.

Project concept

The goal is to improve the quality of life of people with mental illness through the implementation of community focused HIV/AIDS interventions. The goal is linked to measurable and time bound objectives. The project will build the capacity of the local health structure to support PLWHA and mental illness and prevention of further transmission of HIV. In addition, members of the community will be mobilised to take active roles to provide health promotion in the community setting.

The project will address the issues of adherence through:

- i) Compliance therapy
- ii) Cognitive functioning preservation programmes
- iii) Food Garden Project / Nutrition Food Security
- iv) Creativities group

Project objectives

- Baseline information concerning prevention, care and holistic treatment of HIV positive psychiatric patients.
- Enhancement of positive prevention through involvement of HIV positive psychiatric patients in community education.
- Voluntary testing and counseling by strengthening the capacity of the psychiatric community and their families in accessing care and treatment for both HIV/AIDS and psychiatric illnesses.
- Improve knowledge of community members about mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS.
- Improve adherence to ART through a structured programme including food garden security, activities groups, support groups, and compliance therapy.
- Development of community based services within the Soweto area for psychiatric patients with comorbid HIV/AIDS.
- To provide ART to patients with HIV/AIDS and mental illness who are currently largely ignored.
- To improve collaboration among Government, hospital and community psychiatric and HIV services and other stakeholders such as NGOs.

Project Components

Provide **Voluntary Counselling and Testing** to enable people with mental illness to find out their sero-status and receive appropriate psychological support.

Training and supervision of community health care networks in basic counselling, the referral of opportunistic infections and food security and nutrition.

Peer counsellors will be trained in **primary and secondary prevention, and supportive counselling**.

Existing support groups will be trained and empowered to develop **community mobilisation activities**, especially around care and treatment issues.

The **network of NGOs** is vital in providing services that the government cannot; NGOs will be given technical training to **increase their capacity**. In implementing this project, Luthando will work in partnership with other PLWHA organisations.

Research is vitally needed in this field in order to improve patient care. Research will focus on the effect of ART on mental illness, interactions between antiretrovirals and psychotropic medication and the impact of mental illness and the interventions and adherence. Through this research, protocols and guidelines will be developed to submit to the Provincial and National Government for effective reproduction of the model in community based services throughout the Province and eventually the country.

Monitoring and evaluation

The outcome of this project will be to increase the number of PLWHA and mental illness linked to appropriate health promotion activities, care and treatment through a community-based network. Sustainability is assured by using existing community and health structures.

Imbedded operational research and M & E framework provided by STF TAP faculty will monitor and evaluate the projects.

Faculty members

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