



IMPROVING LINKAGE OF HIV POSITIVE PATIENTS TO CARE AND TREATMENT

Private Health Sector Project



Improving Linkage of HIV positive patients to care and treatment

Introduction

Ending the AIDS epidemic is more than a historic obligation to the 39 million people who have died of the disease. HIV treatment is a critical tool towards ending the AIDS epidemic, but it is not the only one. To end HIV epidemic, UNAIDS set an ambitious target of 90-90-90 to be achieved by 2020: 90% of people living with HIV will be diagnosed, 90 % of people diagnosed with HIV will receive antiretroviral therapy (ART), and of those on ART, 90 % will achieve viral suppression by 2020.

In order to get people with HIV on treatment a critical step is to link them to HIV care and treatment for the number of HIV testing sites in Ethiopia is more than double than that of care and treatment sites. Linkage to care and treatment was the major challenge in Private Health Sector Project (PHSP) supported sites: out of 1,177 HIV positives identified during a quarter, only 688 (58%) of clients were linked to care and treatment (Oct to Dec 2016). One of the major reasons identified as a gap was documentation and decentralized referral and linkage.

To improve the documentation and to make the referral linkage centralized in supported facilities, the project implemented linkage monitoring and improvement interventions.

Implementation of the practice

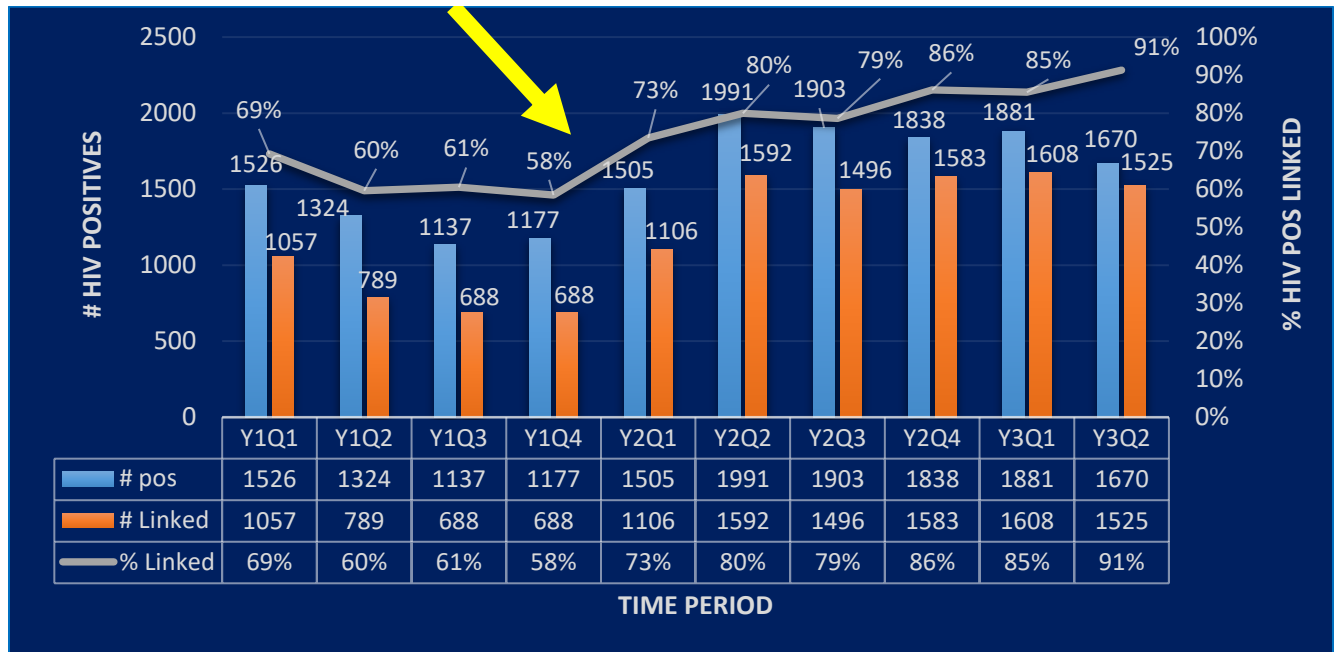
To improve linkage of HIV positives to care and treatment, PHSP implemented the following interventions in supported facilities.

- Developed a linkage monitoring tool, printed and distributed to all supported facilities for implementation;
- Supported facilities to make all HIV positives identified are referred through focal getting the necessary information documentation (centralize the referral system);
- Printed carbon-copied standardized linkage referral pads and distributed to all supported facilities;
- Provided wireless telephones to high-yield supported facilities;
- Provided monthly airtime mobile card so that providers could follow up with clients and confirm referrals for linkage to care and treatment; and
- Provided focused and continuous mentorship and supportive supervision on linkage to all facilities on linkage and referrals.

Results of the practice

After the implementation of the above interventions, linkage of HIV positives to care and treatment improved progressively in subsequent quarters and in sustained manner. Documentation and monitoring of the HIV positives outcomes with regard to linkage to care and treatment improved significantly. The improvement in the documentation of the outcomes of all HIV positives helps the facilities in properly managing, reporting and requesting supplies (rapid test kits) thereby strengthening the facilities' smooth relationship with sub-city/ town health offices.

Fig I. Trend of HIV positives linkage to care and treatment in PHSP supported facilities, Oct 2015 to Mar. 2018



Lessons Learned

- Centralizing the referral linkage system is very important for bigger facilities where there are multiple HIV test outlets/modalities to properly link the identified HIV positive clients to care and treatment and monitor the overall outcomes of the referred/ linked clients.
- Proper documentation and monitoring is important for improving quality of care and supply management service.
- Confirming the linkage of HIV positive to care and treatment service is crucial for attaining the test and start strategy and 90-90-90 targets.
- Linkage monitoring is a crucial component of intervention that bridges the first 90 to the subsequent 90s.

Conclusion

With the above practice, PHSP is making progress towards achieving its objective of linking all HIV positives identified in supported facilities to care and treatment service for early initiation of ART.

Key components of the intervention - linkage monitoring tool (register), the centralized referral system and standardized referral pads, and the continuous technical support and follow up - can be applied by all facilities in Ethiopia in order to achieve the 90-90-90 target and then end HIV/AIDS.