

Uptake of early infant diagnosis of HIV in a primary healthcare facility in Cape Town, South Africa.

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Background: Early infant testing is important for ensuring timely initiation of ART and reducing morbidity and mortality among HIV-infected children. However, children often present late to HIV programs in resource-limited settings. This study was aimed at describing uptake of early infant diagnosis (EID) of HIV at birth and 10 weeks, and to identify individual and health systems barriers to effective uptake of EID services at Khayelitsha clinic.

Methods: A mixed method approach was utilized in this study involving quantitative review of facility records and qualitative interviews with healthcare providers and caregivers. Facility records were reviewed from January to December 2016. In-depth interviews were conducted with the clinic operational manager and PMTCT nurse involved in PMTCT services, whilst focus group discussions were held with caregivers.

Results: Uptake of early infant diagnosis of HIV in this study clinic is very promising. The quantitative results show that the proportion of HIV-exposed babies that received their first birth and 10-week test with recorded results, was 98.7% and 97.9% respectively. In the qualitative analysis, the role of community-based service groups (CBS) and short turnaround time for PCR test result (around 2 to 3 days) were attributed as major facilitators for EID program in

this facility. On the other hand, shortage of staff and HIV stigma were identified as some of the barriers to the EID activities in the clinic.

Conclusion: Majority of babies delivered on the PMTCT program in 2016 at this primary health care facility received their first birth PCR and 10-week PCR test with known results and they were linked to care. However, HIV stigma and loss to follow up were some of the challenges against effective uptake of early infant diagnosis in this primary healthcare centre. Hence, community education and pro-active counselling of pregnant women about early infant diagnosis especially during ANC are urgently needed.

RESEARCH ARTICLES