

## HCP Success Story

### **Namibian Nurses Help Prevent Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission**

***IPC Skills Improve Enrollment in PMTCT Programs***

Improving interpersonal communication and counseling skills for those working with people with HIV or AIDS is essential. This is especially true in preventing mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of the HIV virus. In Namibia, the Health Communication Partnership's Quality Communication Assurance program began with a pilot Interpersonal Communication training module for nurses working in five faith-based hospitals.

In these five hospitals — St. Mary's in Rehoboth, St Martin in Oshikuku, the Lutheran Hospital in Onanjokwe, Sacred Heart Hospital in Nyangana, and Holy Family Hospital in Andara — HCP found some skepticism among nurses about the benefits of PMTCT. If the nurses didn't believe in its value, how could they discuss the issue with HIV-positive mothers and convince them to enroll in PMTCT programs?

A forum helped them understand better their own attitudes about HIV/AIDS. Most had heard about PMTCT but were not comfortable discussing it with HIV-positive mothers because they felt they lacked basic knowledge on the subject. Subsequent training sessions addressed the negative attitudes found among the nurses towards HIV patients.

This pilot led to better communication between nurses and their clients by encouraging them to treat their clients with dignity and empathy. In the five hospitals, nurses felt empowered because they possessed the communication skills to confidently discuss PMTCT with patients. Because of their positive attitudes, these nurses act as PMTCT "entry points" for HIV-positive mothers, thus increasing enrollment in PMTCT programs in the five hospitals. The quality of patient care overall improved at the hospitals because of the nurses' improved communication and counseling skills.

The Nursing Service department within Namibia's Ministry of Health recognized the pilot's success. "IPC training on PMTCT should be given to each and every nurse, especially those in outpatients departments, family planning services, and gynecology wards," said the head of Nursing Services. "We need to grab this opportunity because communication skills for nurses are not being addressed in most pre-nursing services in this country."

Next year, seven training sessions will be held as a prelude to the program's launch in government hospitals. The training is expected to be incorporated into the pre-nursing training curriculum. The interpersonal communication and counseling training is also being used by HCP's partner ChildLine LifeLine for community counselors who will begin working in government hospitals. HCP trained the first group of 24 community counselors, who will relieve some of the burden on nurses by conducting pre and posttest counseling as well as administering the recently approved HIV rapid test. Three staffers from ChildLine LifeLine will be trained early next year to continue training these

community counselors. “I can comfortably counsel my clients to enroll into the PMTCT program using the communication skills I learned,” said one trainee.

Another USAID partner, CDC through ITECT, adapted and incorporated components of the module into the PMTCT curriculum. Checklists guiding nurses and counselors on important PMTCT discussion points were developed and piloted for distribution to participating hospitals. Early next year, HCP will expand the module to include communication involving anti-retroviral therapy.

HCP — which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and based at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health’s Center for Communication Programs — is committed to interpersonal communication and counseling training because it is sustainable and will enhance quality service delivery for the PMTCT and ART program in Namibia.