

Cervical cancer prevention during COVID-19 pandemic: The CRS EPIC3-90 project, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Background:

The Epidemic Control 90-90-90 (EpiC 3-90) Project is a U.S Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) funded project that supports the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Zambia to achieve the UNAIDS 90-90-90 targets in faith-based and Government facilities. The project also supports prevention activities including cervical cancer (CaCx) screening in Women Living with HIV (WLHIV). CaCx remains the most frequent cancer in Zambia accounting for about 25% of all new cancer cases annually. It is also the most common cause of cancer related death in the country. EpiC 3-90 carried out technical support to the 15 supported districts from April 2020 to September 2020 to improve the CaCx screening in WLHIV.

Methods:

EpiC 3-90 created an HIV prevention & comorbidities unit, with adequate staffing to support the establishment of CaCx screening points in supported regions. Three new screening sites were opened in locations with the largest projected number of WLHIV and 43 new providers were trained to staff both new and existing facilities. Community outreach was also carried out in all supported districts. To prevent overcrowding, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, a staggered appointment system was employed at the sites. Other measures put in place was observance of social distancing, hand washing facilities and ensuring that both the staff and clients were masked-up. Mentorship in documentation and technical support was provided. We present findings from October 2019 to September 2020.

Results:

The average number of WLHIV screened for cervical cancer increased from 242 per month (October 2019-March 2020) to 442 (April-September 2020) indicating 82.6% improvement. This translated to an increase in the number of WLHIV who were screened from 1,450 in the first half of the year to 2,651 in the second half of the year. By September 2020, 4,101 WLHIV had been screened for CaCx (Figure 1).

Conclusion:

It is possible to improve access to safe cervical cancer prevention services during the COVID-19 pandemic in WLHIV through a coordinated approach among key stakeholders and service providers. CaCx prevention services need to continue due to its high disease burden in Zambia. (Table Presented).

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