

Health Worker Text Messaging for Training

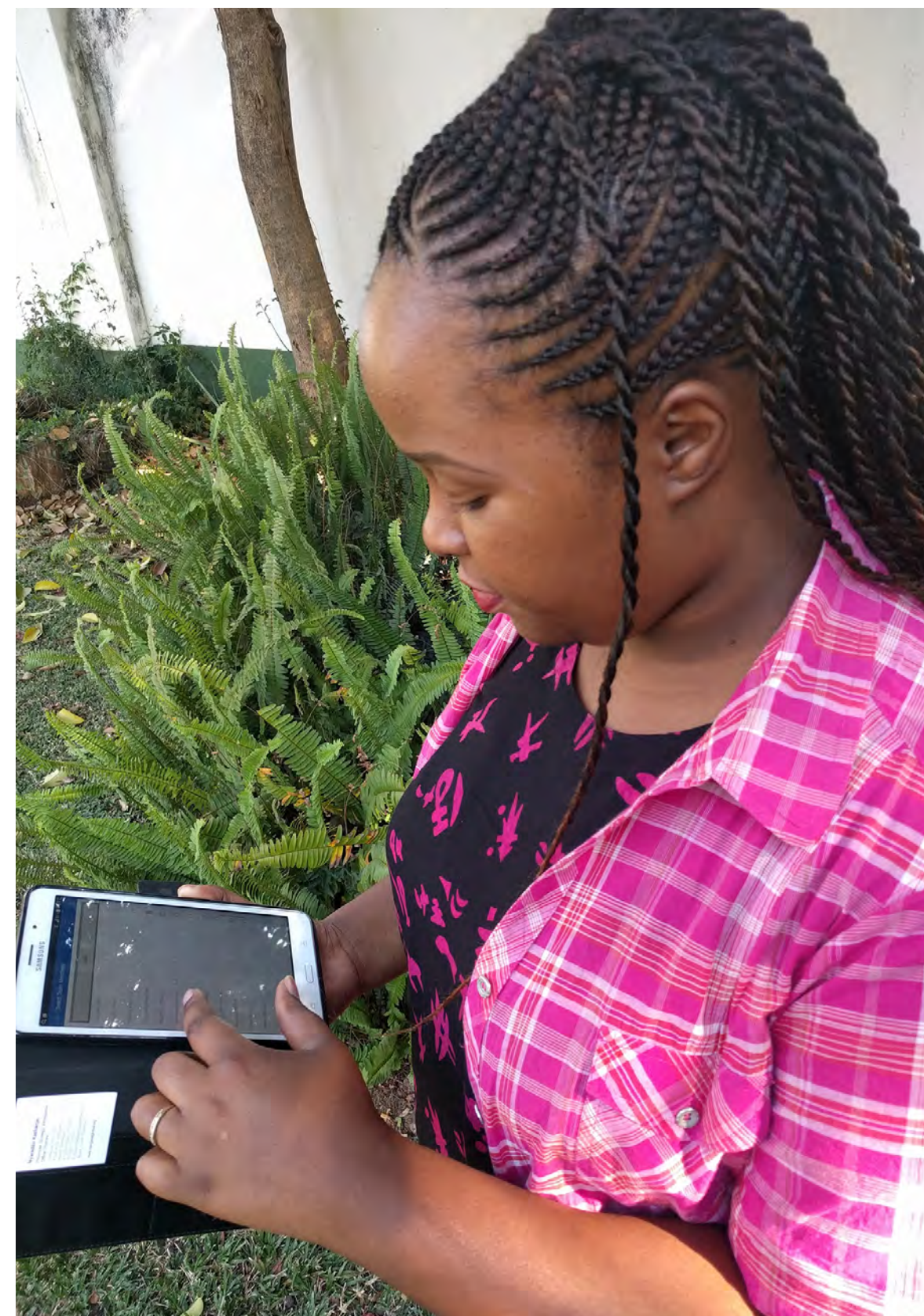
Peer Support, and Mentoring in Pediatric and Adolescent HIV/AIDS Care: Lessons Learned in Zimbabwe

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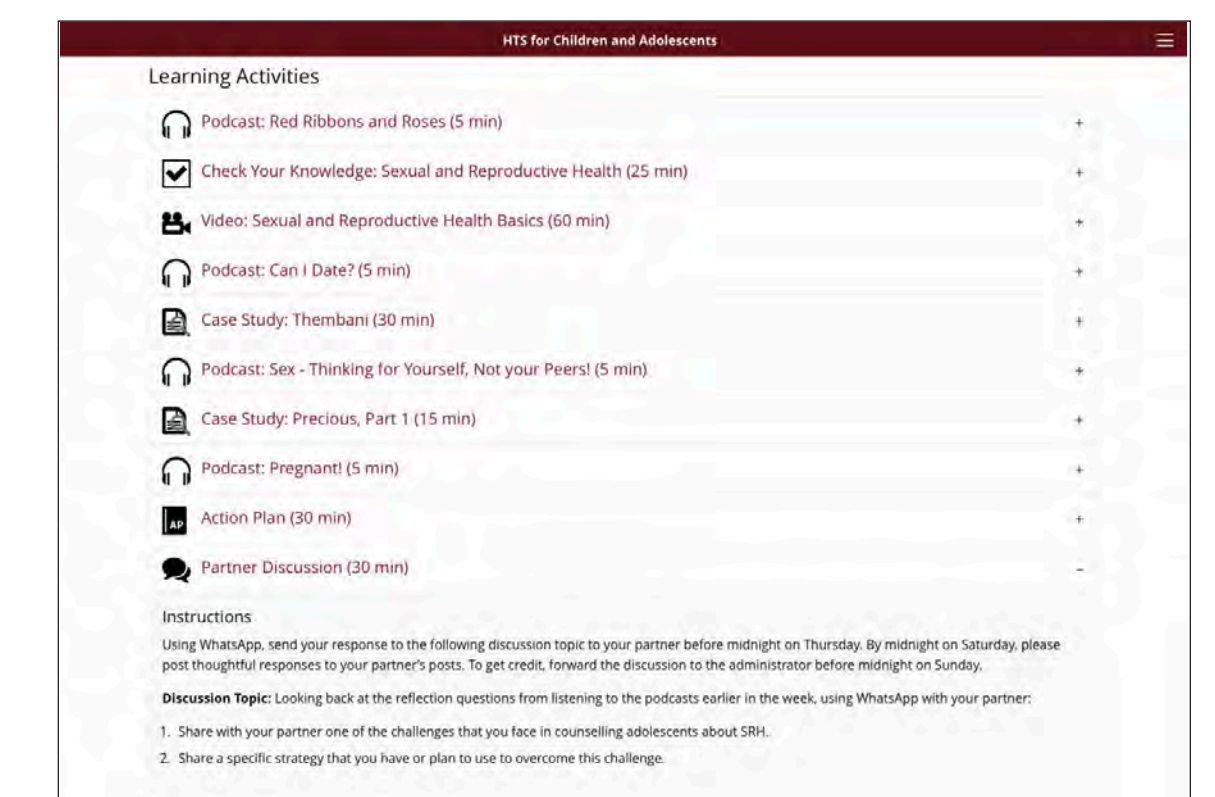
BACKGROUND

- This study assessed the use of the text messaging component of a blended learning program to build skills, knowledge and confidence of primary counsellors to care for children and adolescents with HIV.
- Global HIV/AIDS targets necessitate strengthening HIV-related counseling services among children, adolescents and their families. In order to meet these targets, Zimbabwe needs to train more health care workers.
- Innovative, cost-effective approaches are needed, as Zimbabwe's resources for training and mentoring are limited.
- Blended learning incorporates electronic media and discussion groups using the mobile phone text messaging application, WhatsApp.
- Peer-to-peer learning and work-based learning support are important components to effective distance training programmes.
- WhatsApp is a commonly used technology in Zimbabwe.



STRUCTURE

- Forty-three health care workers completed the blended learning course "HIV Testing Services for Children and Adolescents" between August and October 2016.
- 42 of the 43 participants participated in the WhatsApp component of the training
- Participants used WhatsApp as a forum for peer-to-peer learning and support. There were two formats used:
 - Large group discussion with full cohort.
 - Weekly partner discussions (assignments) based on questions that were incorporated into the material.



RESULTS

- Participants strongly endorsed using WhatsApp groups as part of the training.
- Participants generated over 300 entries and continued discussions after all course assignments were complete.
- Two "spin-off" text messaging groups emerged from this experience, including a WhatsApp support group for teens.
- Communication categories tracked included greetings and social contacts, inquiries, comments, and responses about course assignments, participants' own case consultations, feedback, and encouragement.
- Case discussions were complex, including patient history, symptoms, medications, and psychosocial issues (child abuse, adherence, and disclosure).

“Was an easy way to do case conferencing in real time.”
“Someone else’s challenging case will help me to deal with my own similar cases.”
“Kindly ask to keep this group running even after this training– its helpful at our site.”

Here’s an example WhatsApp discussion among training participants

5:38:03 AM: My main question is, what Im I suppose to do as primary counselor if some one is not willing to disclose her status to husband. Claiming that by doing so her marriage will collapse. Beside giving information

5:53:24 AM: May be Refer her for Hts as a couple or ask her to bring husband for testing and you test them as a couple then disclosure be done

5:53:40 AM: We juss do proper counseling for her to make an informed decision

5:53:42 AM: Disclosure is a process, on going counselling is needed also tell her the effects of delaying disclosure

5:57:47 AM: Eliza do you mean to say we have to retest a positive result to help disclosure in discorded couples

5:57:57 AM: On going counselling until she is ready

6:11:27 AM: Disclosure really is a process, lets empower our clients, its goodness to the client and to the partner, it will work .see now accidental disclosure, marriage affected, stress leading to poor health, maybe she was also not taking medication properly because of fear of being seen by the husband, no safe sex, hey guys pane basa

6:16:54 AM: Thank u guyz

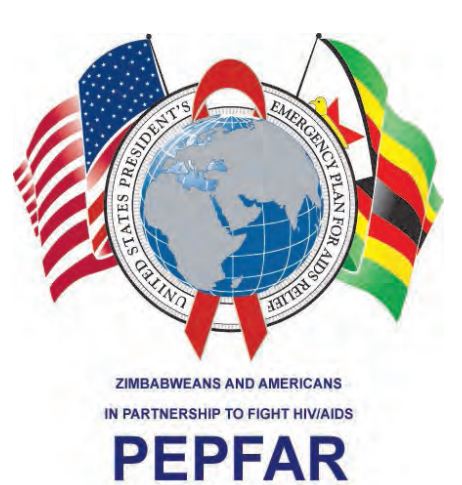
6:22:20 AM: Its possible she might not be adhering to medication because she dd not disclose. Talk to her about drug resistance and the dangers of it she might reconsider disclosing.

CONCLUSIONS

The positive results of this assessment indicate that text messaging discussion groups can be an effective adjunct to training courses for health workers. It is a low-cost platform for building health care worker competence and enhancing care in low resource settings.

Lessons learned include:

- 1 Provide orientation in advance of initiating groups;
- 2 Include guidance on discussion group norms for entries, language, cases, and feedback;
- 3 Assign a moderator to guide the following of norms; and
- 4 Complete one case before moving to the next.



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