

Using a health broadcast channel as a means of disseminating information about HIV/AIDS in South Africa

M Molefi, M Kachieng'a & S Wynchank

Telemedicine Research Centre,
Medical Research Council (MRC) of South Africa
Pretoria, South Africa
Tel. + 27-12-3398524
Fax. + 27-123398593

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Introduction

Dissemination of knowledge and information on HIV/AIDS to the community has been identified as a key strategy for the future well being of South Africa. Such effective dissemination and communication about HIV/AIDS is hindered by South Africa's infrastructure, poor training and under-resourced environments, specifically in its rural areas. The Mindset Health Channel was identified as a strategic and effective resource that could be used to reach a wide-ranging audience in rural and urban areas, and to improve the knowledge and skills of health care workers in managing HIV/AIDS related problems in South Africa. Selection of this project was based upon its anticipated outputs, project processes, sustainability and replicability, and the role of technology and technology transfer in its execution. Patients have the opportunity to view important health information whilst waiting to be attended to in a health care centre, unlike the previous situation when they would sit for long hours without any stimulation or useful information being made available to them. This project is the only one of its kind to be undertaken in the African Continent. The findings present lessons learned during Phase One of the Health Broadcast Channel in South Africa. The health channel is an example from which we (at the Tele Medicine Research Centre of the MRC, and others in other countries or organizations) may learn.

Project description

Project Title: The Mindset Health Channel

Sub-sector: Medical Research Council South Africa - Telemedicine Research Centre-

Locations: The following South African Provinces: KwaZulu Natal, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Northern Cape, North West and Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Free State

Implementing agency: Mindset Network

Status: Active in most provinces in South Africa The Health Channel (the Channel) is a partnership between the National Department of Health (NDoH), Mindset, MRC and Sentech, which was launched in South Africa in 2003.

The Mindset Health Channel is a pilot study, applying audiovisual and computer technology, implemented at 56 sites in all the nine provinces of South Africa, including urban, peri urban and rural environments. Activities undertaken by the participating organisations involved implementing a satellite broadcast channel through which HIV/AIDS information could be disseminated at health care facilities, by broadcasting daily to both patients/general public and also professional and lay healthcare workers. Data casting (the forwarding and storing of data via an internet protocol (IP) satellite platform) is being used to complement the broadcasts into sites, allowing users to view content stored on a local PC storage device “on demand” daily. This technology has empowered health professionals and lay counsellors to access HIV/AIDS and related information via satellite transmissions using computers and TV screens installed in the health care centres. A TV and an IP box are installed in the waiting areas within the health facilities for the patients. For the health professional workers a TV set and desktop computers are provided. The specific method employed enables (a) patients to view up to 100 hours of HIV/TB related content from appropriate media providers and consists of content packaged in the form of health news, with presenter introduction, health reports, drama, documentaries, public service announcements and educational programmes and (b) health professionals to view and access information stored in the computer in the form of videos.

Objective

Delivering a comprehensive set content on HIV/AIDS, TB and other major health issues to health care workers and patients/the general public in South Africa using modern technology that reaches both urban and rural users.

Methodology

Rapid assessment response (RAR) with patients, health professional workers and lay counsellors, in-depth interview with the implementing agency

Lessons learned and recommendations

- The Channel took into account the various languages spoken in South Africa.
- The project targets the public sector and public health sector rather than the private sector.
- The broadcasts support people living with HIV and address the medical, physical social and economical impacts of HIV disease.
- The channel created both permanent and temporary employment

- The project is designed with a wide African reach, so that the model and methodology can easily be replicated in other parts of Africa, with translation or sourcing of content into the local languages.
- The technology is user friendly and inexpensive, so it is well suited to the lack of sophisticated information communications and technology (ICT) knowledge of its users and the economic situation.
- Consultative processes during implementation are important to ensure a sense of ownership among health professionals
- Optimal day - to - day operation and maintenance of the Channel can be made possible with effective technical support from the call center.
- The NDoH is seen as an important link for this project to succeed, and to enhance understanding and use of the Channel.
- There is a perceived need for using indigenous South African languages in the making of the programmes.
- The security bars (to protect the monitors) should be designed so that they do not obstruct viewing.
- Programme schedules and viewing times are chosen to suit the users
- Correct positioning of the television to ensure improved audibility and visibility has been addressed.
- There is a need for quarterly progress reports on the Health Channel, to track its progress and to provide feedback to stakeholders.
- The important role of the South African Nursing Council in future content development.
- Provision of participatory training in practical computer skills to health care workers for optimal use of the Channel.

Conclusions

The installation of a Health Channel is feasible despite constraints in current South African infrastructure. This project is an exemplary demonstration of how modern technology can be used to disseminate HIV/AIDS information to both health professionals and patients. The use of this technology to reach masses of people in a hospital setting is an achievement, specifically at a time when greatly increased HIV/AIDS information is needed. The Channel has succeeded in improving awareness and understanding of the situations it was intended to address and has left a great impact in those facilities where it has been implemented. This has been established from the results of evaluation techniques using RAR and in depth interviews. However there is a need to modify the broadcast model in some aspects (e.g. technical improvements, to make it even more user friendly) and to improve training in general. The choice of technology was appropriate for the project and is a guiding factor especially in rural areas where telecommunications infrastructure is often not well established.

Recommendations

Given the South African Governments' involvement in the roll out will of antiretroviral medication programmes, it is highly recommended that additional information on Voluntary counseling and testing, antiretroviral medication and the importance of compliance while taking antiretrovirals be included in the broadcasts.

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Figure 1.

A picture of a Health Channel Broadcast, which is similar to the health professionals' broadcast but with different content.



Figure 2: On the left is a picture of a television and remote control, and on the right is a Video-in knowledge-out (Viko box), which refers to the PC storage device installed at sites to receive the IP data casting. Health professionals can access information stored on to the Viko box via their PC storage device.

