

Nimart-trained Nurses' Perspectives Regarding Virally Unsuppressed Children HIV-positive on Antiretroviral Therapy and Missing Scheduled Clinic Visits: Mopani District, Limpopo Province

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Abstract : Background: Sustaining adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART) over the long term by people, especially children living with Human-Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), requires accurate and consistent monitoring, and this is a particular challenge for countries in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the regularity and punctuality in monthly antiretroviral treatment collections indicate medication adherence to a certain extent since it has been revealed to be a significant determinant of the outcome of ART. Aim: This study assessed and described the pattern of monthly antiretroviral treatment collections among a cohort of virally unsuppressed HIV-positive children initiated and managed on ART in the rural public clinics of Mopani District, Limpopo, and explored the nurses' perceptions and views of the findings. Methods: A facility-based mixed-methods study was conducted to assess the honoring of scheduled monthly treatment collection practices by a cohort of HIV-positive children under 15 years initiated and managed on ART by Nurse Initiated Management of Antiretroviral Treatment (NIMART)-trained professional nurses (PNs) from 01 January 2015 to 31 December 2015 in public PHC clinics of Mopani District Municipality. This was followed by the exploration of the nurses' perceptions and views regarding this issue to share their experiences and knowledge acquired through managing these children on ART. Results: From a total of 7105 analysable visits, only 44% (3134) were honored as scheduled, with 40% (2828) of children presenting to the clinics after the scheduled appointment date - they missed their appointments, and 11% (768) of treatment collections that took place before the scheduled appointment date. This finding was further confirmed by 90% (97) of the nurses, who reported that they have children who miss scheduled appointments in their public clinics. The primary reasons for children missing appointments were related to caregivers' forgetfulness and conflict between the school schedule and the dates of clinic visits. Conclusion: We confirmed a high prevalence of non-adherence to scheduled monthly ART collections and the existence of health system, social, and caregiver-related factors that threaten treatment adherence and proper clinical outcomes. These findings suggest an urgent need for intervention since non-adherence to ARV therapy can be life-threatening to the child and poses the danger of reduced life expectancy.

Keywords : antiretroviral therapy (art), nimart, virally unsuppressed children, missed appointments

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