

The Cryptococcal Screening Programme Update

Verushka Chetty

Cryptococcus meningitis is a common AIDS-defining opportunistic infection and a leading cause of death amongst individuals in Southern Africa. Targeted screening of patients with a CD4+ T-lymphocyte count <100 cells/µl for cryptococcal antigenaemia is a newer intervention that has the potential to detect patients earlier and prevent deaths. Screening has been recommended as part of the National Strategic Plan on HIV, STIs and TB, 2012-2016; a detailed monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan was developed to measure the impact of the programme.

The screening programme is unique in that facility health care workers (based at 120 randomly selected, enhanced facilities) have to actively follow-up patients and collect demographic and clinical data using a standardised tool. Nurse M&E officers are responsible for visiting enhanced sites on a monthly basis to update missing information, track patient follow-up and document use and availability of fluconazole.

Progress so far:

Over 600 professionals (master trainers, doctors, nurses, pharmacists and ART counsellors) have been trained.

Funding for fluconazole to treat all CrAg+ patients identified through the screening programme has been secured via a grant.

Since screening was implemented at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital on 3 September 2012, 124 CrAg+ patients have been screened.

The Team

The crypto screening team welcomed 2 new M&E officers (based at Tambo Memorial and Natal-spruit). Interviews have been conducted for 3 project nurses and a database administrator), with interviews pending for the Pelonomi SO and data manager.

Our Travels

Nelesh Govender, Verushka Chetty and Melony Fortuin de-Smidt conducted a site visit to Free State during 18-19 April 2013. The medical manager, infectious disease specialist, NHLS laboratory employees and M&E representatives from Health Systems Trust (HST) attended a presentation at Pelonomi Hospital on Thursday, 18 April 2013. Master trainers from HST were trained at HST premises on Friday, 19 April 2013. Another site visit to meet with Free State provincial officials is planned for the end of April.

Exciting happenings: A mid-year programme review is planned for 22-23 May, 2013. Delegates from NICD, NHLS, CDC, USAID and various stakeholders will be in attendance.

Case statistics for Phase 1 of the *Cryptococcus* screening programme

Case Statistics	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Total
Number of patients tested for CrAg	467	607	548	378	580	389	2969
Number of CrAg-positive patients/ number of patients tested for CrAg (%)	25/467 (5.4%)	30/607 (4.9%)	16/548 (2.9%)	13/378 (3.4%)	18/580 (3.1%)	22/389 (5.7%)	124/2969 (4.2%)
Number of CrAg-positive patients who had a lumbar puncture † **	4	9	8	3	1	2	27
Number of CrAg-positive patients who had a lumbar puncture with laboratory-confirmed CM †	3	6	6	2	0	2	19
Number of CrAg-positive patients treated with fluconazole †	18	20	11	9	12	3	73

†Data source: NHLS Corporate Data Warehouse, NHLS laboratory information system and NICD; †data may be incomplete at the time of reporting due to retrospective collection of clinical data: **lumbar puncture is indicated based on clinical findings; CrAg: cryptococcal antigenaemia; CM: cryptococcal meningitis