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Congratulations!!

to the team from Uganda for winning the Excellence in Counseling Award at the MTN Annual Meeting in recognition of their consistency in conducting high quality counseling sessions

Timely Uploads

We have noticed delays in uploading recorded counseling sessions onto ATLAS. As a result, we sometimes receive a bunch of sessions at the same time that were conducted over the past few weeks. This keeps us from offering you feedback that could improve your next session, so we sometimes see counselors making the same mistakes. We ask that you please upload your sessions as soon as possible after they were recorded—at the very latest by the Friday of the week in which the session was recorded.

An alternative beginning to sessions

Through working with the different COACH teams, I have learned that in some teams the Options counseling is done by a separate counselor and in other teams, the nurse that has been with the participant during their visit also conducts the Options counseling. In this second situation, it may be strange to use the welcoming statement that's included in the Options manual. Here is an alternative approach that you can use. First, clearly shift the conversation from the clinical duties to the counseling; Second, affirm the participant; Third, emphasize that this portion of the visit really focuses on them. Here is an example:

“Now that we have done all of the clinical work, lets switch to the counseling so we can talk a bit about how things have been going for you using the Ring and the other HIV prevention approaches you selected. Now, we finally get to focus on YOU and helping you stay HIV negative. So, thank you for your patience with all the other study procedures and your commitment to the study, I know you travel from far to get here for your visits.”

The new demo video of a Follow-Up session with a Level 1 Protection (see link below) starts with this new approach so you see how it can be conducted.



Counseling Participants with Level 1 Protection

As you all know, we are still learning about Ring drug levels and protection from HIV and how best to explain this to participants. As we listen to sessions, and to your experiences in the counseling sessions, we are hearing that there are some participants who are reporting very consistent use of the Ring (and we really believe them!) but are getting Level 1 Protection. As a result, some of these participants are questioning whether to continue using the Ring since it seems that the Ring is not offering them much protection from HIV.

To help guide you in this situation, we created a new video demonstrating this scenario. In the video with me is Clare, who rates our sessions in Luganda. Here is the link to the new video:

<https://youtu.be/enDnwhJqoSA>

As you watch the video, pay close attention to a few things:

- 1) I open the session with the alternative approach that I described earlier in this newsletter
- 2) When discussing the Level 1 Results:
 - a. I empathize with her surprise
 - b. I remind her that these results may not be 100% perfect, that we are still learning about these levels and hope to learn more about them from the HOPE study
 - c. I reiterate that she says she is using the Ring very consistently and I stress that that is what is most important because if used every day the Ring will provide high protection
 - d. After getting permission to offer my thoughts about it, I suggest she wait to see the results from her other Rings, prior to deciding whether or not to continue using the Ring.
- 3) This was also a very verbal participant who openly spoke about how the Level 1 protection concerned her since it could mean she was at risk of infection and how important it was for her to remain HIV negative. Since she was speaking openly about this, I did some reflections, but did not have to ask her the questions on the flipchart. But, if she would not have spoken about this on her own, I would have asked those questions to get her thinking about her risk.