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ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Engaging the ‘Missing Men’ in the HIV Treatment Cascade: Creating a Tailored Intervention to Improve Men’s Uptake of HIV Care Services in Rural South Africa: A Study Protocol

The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health via MDPI | 2 April 2021

Oluwafemi Adeagbo and Kamilla Naidoo

Men, especially young men, have been consistently missing from the HIV care cascade, leading to poor health outcomes in men and ongoing transmission of HIV in young women in South Africa. Although these men may not be missing for the same reasons across the cascade and may need different interventions, early work has shown similar trends in men’s low uptake of HIV care services and suggested that the social costs of testing and accessing care are extremely high for men, particularly in South Africa. Interventions and data collection have hitherto, by and large, focused on men in relation to HIV prevention in women and have not approached the problem through the male lens. Using the participatory method, the overall aim of this study is to improve health outcomes in men and women through formative work to co-create male-specific interventions in an HIV-hyper endemic setting in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

6-month neurological and psychiatric outcomes in 236 379 survivors of COVID-19: a retrospective cohort study using electronic health records

The Lancet | 6 April 2021

Maxime Taquet, John Geddes, Masud Husain, Sierra Luciano, Paul Harrison

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began on March 11, 2020, there has been concern that survivors might be at an increased risk of neurological disorders. This concern, initially based on findings from other coronaviruses, was followed rapidly by case series, emerging evidence of COVID-19 CNS involvement, and the identification of mechanisms by which this could occur. Similar concerns have been raised regarding psychiatric sequelae of COVID-19, with evidence showing that survivors are indeed at increased risk of mood and anxiety disorders in the 3 months after infection. However, we need large scale, robust, and longer term data to properly identify and quantify the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on brain health. Such information is required both to plan services and identify research priorities. In this study, we used an electronic health records network to investigate the incidence of

neurological and psychiatric diagnoses in survivors in the 6 months after documented clinical COVID-19 infection, and we compared the associated risks with those following other health conditions.

Comparison of seven commercial SARS-CoV-2 rapid point-of-care antigen tests: a single-centre laboratory evaluation study

The Lancet Microbe | 7 April 2021

The ongoing SARS-CoV-2 pandemic continues to challenge public health systems worldwide. In the absence of global vaccine availability or effective drugs, virus detection by real-time RT-PCR (RT-rtPCR) has been widely adopted to enable non-pharmaceutical interventions based on case finding and contact tracing. Because of its high sensitivity and specificity, RT-rtPCR is the gold standard for SARS-CoV-2 detection. RT-rtPCR is a laboratory-based procedure that requires sophisticated equipment, trained personnel, and logistical planning for sample shipment and results communication. Timeliness of results is crucial for the control of onward transmission, due to shedding of infectious virus mainly occurring around the time of symptom onset. However, delays in obtaining RT-rtPCR results are widespread, and they are compounded by the increasing demand for RT-rtPCR tests that are certified for in-vitro diagnostic application, which creates supply bottlenecks and a shortfall of overall testing capacity in many countries.

Sexual and reproductive health self-care in humanitarian and fragile settings: Where should we start?

Reliefweb | 8 April 2021

Nguyen Tran, Hannah Tappis, Pierre Moon, Megan Christofield, Angela Dawson

Recent crises have accelerated global interest in self-care interventions. This debate paper aims to raise the issue of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) self-care and invites members of the global community operating in crisis-affected settings to look at potential avenues in mainstreaming SRH self-care interventions. We start by exploring self-care interventions that could align with well-established humanitarian standards, such as the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for Sexual and Reproductive Health in Crises, point to the potential of digital health support for SRH self-care in crisis-affected settings, and discuss related policy, programmatic, and research considerations. These considerations underscore the importance of self-care as part of the care continuum and within a whole-system approach. Equally critical is the need for self-care in crisis-affected settings to complement other live-saving SRH interventions—it does not eliminate the need for provider-led services in health facilities. Further research on SRH self-care interventions focusing distinctively on humanitarian and fragile settings is needed to inform context-specific policies and practice guidance.

Hemodynamic Response to High- and Low-Load Resistance Exercise in Patients with Coronary Artery Disease: A Randomized, Crossover Clinical Trial

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health | 8 April 2021

Tim Kambic, Vedran Hadžić, Mitja Lainscak

Cardiac rehabilitation (CR) is a recommended multidisciplinary intervention for the treatment and secondary prevention of cardiovascular diseases, with emphasis on improving patients' cardiovascular risk factors, exercise capacity, nutritional status, and psychosocial well-being. Exercise training represents a core component of CR, in which aerobic training is predominately prescribed and studied, whereas resistance training remains underused. Despite being recommended for >20 years the implementation of resistance training in clinical practice is still limited by the heterogeneous training protocols, including variation of intensity (30–80% of one repetition maximum (1-RM)), number of repetitions (8–20), rest periods between sets (30–90 s), and speed of repetitions (1–3 s per contraction). There also remains a concern about excessive changes in blood pressure (BP) and heart rate (HR), in particular when the patient is exercising with the Valsalva maneuver. All these issues reflect the lack of consensus between scientific organizations in different countries.

Undisclosed exposure to antiretrovirals prior to treatment initiation: An exploratory analysis

Southern African Journal of HIV Medicine | 8 April 2021

Lufuno Mavhandu-Ramarumo, Lisa Tambe, Nontokozi Matume, David Katerere, Pascal Bessong

Considering evidence that treatment significantly reduces HIV transmission at the population level, the South African National Department of Health (SANDoH) introduced a Universal Test and Treat (UTT) programme in September 2016; a move whereby all tested persons enter treatment irrespective of the

initiating level of the CD4+ T-cell count. Several key assumptions are included in UTT. These include the fact that the tested person 'newly' diagnosed with HIV is naïve to antiretroviral therapy (ART) and is infected with a strain of HIV susceptible to the recommended first-line ART regimen. Further, it is assumed that the prevalence of circulating drug-resistant virus in the pre-treated population is negligible and will not impact treatment outcomes. The World Health Organization (WHO) categorises the pre-treatment -drug-resistance at the population level as low if the incidence of drug resistance < 5%; moderate if 5% – 15% and high if > 15%. In South Africa (SA), the level of drug resistance in the pre-treated population has increased over time but is heterogeneous across and within provinces.

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RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

Damning report on Eastern Cape Health Department's mental health programme shows little to no progress

Maverick Citizen | 5 April 2021

In three years, the Eastern Cape Department of Health has made dismal progress in improving the mental health services in the province. The mental health programme was placed under administration in 2018 after a Health Ombudsman report. A damning report on the lack of progress made in improving the Eastern Cape's mental health programme has revealed that apart from advertising for a director post and succeeding in preventing stockouts, very little progress has been made in improving the public sector's mental health services in the past three years. The report was also submitted to the Health Committee of the Eastern Cape Legislature.

Western Cape forging ahead with bid to procure more coronavirus vaccines

SABC News | 6 April 2021

Western Cape Premier, Alan Winde, says provincial health officials are continuing in their attempts to procure more coronavirus vaccines. The province, despite being supplied by national government with vaccines, is working towards independently procuring more doses to aid in the country's fight against the spread of COVID-19. Winde says, "I [we] need to have many more vaccines so we can get back to work. Of course it is a competitive place as we as a province are trying to procure our own vaccines. At the end of the month we had 28 companies and wholesalers that we contacted." "I suppose we use the Sisonke programme to see our readiness. We are expecting another 30 000 vaccines now as part of the J&J rollout. As soon as we get vaccines we can start rolling them out to other citizens at risk and then start working through our priorities," explains Winde.

South Africa signs deal for 20 million Pfizer COVID-19 doses

Publication | 6 April 2021

South Africa has signed an agreement with Pfizer Inc for 20 million dual shot COVID-19 vaccine doses, a government official told Reuters on Tuesday, boosting plans to start mass vaccinations from April. The deal is another fillip for the country worst hit by COVID-19 infections in Africa as it adds to the 31 million single-shot doses from Johnson & Johnson which the government approved on Thursday. The first batch from Pfizer is expected to arrive later in April, Anban Pillay, Deputy Director-general at the Department of Health, told Reuters, but he did not comment on the price. The government is buying the J&J vaccine for \$10 per dose. After the Pfizer deal, the government will have enough to vaccinate roughly 41 million people out of its total population of 60 million. The country has also been allocated 12 million shots under the World Health Organization's COVAX scheme and is likely to get doses for 10 million people from the African Union's AVATT initiative. It is not clear whether the COVAX and AVATT doses will be a single shot, dual shot or a mix of both. Health experts have urged the government to scale up its vaccination programme in the light of speculation that Africa's most industrialized country is likely to be hit by a third wave of infections in the winter months of June and July.

Suicide nation: We are humans, not numbers

Maverick Citizen | 6 April 2021

This weekend the Sunday Times reported on a horrific human tragedy. In case you skipped over page 5, here's what happened. In the middle of last week, 32-year-old Russel Makhubela poisoned his two-year-

old daughter Phiwokuhle and tried to kill himself at the same time. That morning, as he went out to collect wood to heat their small shack, he had told his wife, Thanduzile, that he was “tired of struggling”. The couple live in the sprawling informal settlement of Lawley, south of Johannesburg, and on the day Thanduzile reported: “My husband came back and said, ‘What’s the use of collecting firewood, because at the end of the day we will have nothing to eat tomorrow’.” Russel had complained of “the burden” (read indignity) of being the breadwinner but always having to ask his sister for money. He had previously been a security officer, but his registration had lapsed as he couldn’t afford the fees.

Over a third of Covid-19 survivors experience a neurological or mental-health condition in the 6 months after infection – study

Business Insider | 7 April 2021

One in three people infected with Covid-19 develop a neurological or mental-health condition in the six months after, a large study published in *Lancet Psychiatry* on Wednesday found. Diagnoses for these conditions were on average 44% more common after Covid-19 than after flu, and the risk increased with the severity of illness, particularly for neurological disorders, the study authors from Oxford University said. The study looked at more than 236,000 electronic health records, mostly belonging to Americans, and compared people who had Covid-19 with those who hadn’t.

Ivermectin for Covid-19: Compound may be made up on prescription from doctors

Times Live | 7 April 2021

Ivermectin may now be used in SA for the treatment of Covid-19. That is the upshot of a settlement agreement, made an order of court, in four applications against the SA Health Products Regulatory Authority (Sahpra). In terms of the agreement, the anti-parasitic drug can now be “compounded” and prescribed legally for the treatment of specific patients. Doctors no longer have to use the “compassionate use” programme, initiated by Sahpra earlier this year, in which doctors had to apply through the authority’s Section 2 “compassionate use” programme (for unregistered medicines) for permission to use the drug to prevent and treat Covid-19.

Pandemic shows SA urgently needs universal health care: Zweli Mkhize

Times Live | 7 April 2021

Health minister Dr Zweli Mkhize says one of the glaring lessons highlighted by the deadly Covid-19 pandemic is the urgent need for universal health coverage (UHC) to ensure no-one is left behind. “The implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI) is seen as a critical intervention that will assist in restructuring the core components of the health system. “In turn, this will allow for better use of and access to the capacity available in the health sector with better prioritisation of the vulnerable,” said Mkhize.

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TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Health Systems Training Institute

The Health Systems Training Institute (HSTi) offers innovative, tailored and application-driven clinical and non-clinical training solutions aimed at strengthening health systems at all levels and improving the quality of primary health care. Courses on offer include accredited short programmes, non-accredited short programmes and full NQF programmes.

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PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

Meeting report of the WHO expert consultation on drug-resistant tuberculosis treatment outcome definitions, 17-19 November 2020

The World Health Organization (WHO) held an online consultation on the definitions of drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB) treatment outcomes, on 17–19 November 2020. Organized by the WHO Global TB

Programme, Geneva, Switzerland, the consultation was attended by around 70 participants, representing countries, bilateral and multilateral agencies, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, civil society and academia. The consultation discussed recent and potential future developments in treatment regimens for both DR-TB and drug-susceptible TB (DS-TB) and considered possible changes to the treatment outcome definitions needed for programmatic monitoring.

Checklists to Assess vulnerabilities in Health Care Facilities in the Context of Climate Change

Designed as a complementary tool to the WHO Guidance for climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health care facilities, the primary purpose of this document is to support health care facility managers and other health workers in establishing a baseline with regards to climate change resilience in health care facilities. It also aims to inform the design of interventions to strengthen overall resilience and conduct vulnerability assessments in health care facilities.

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CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

The Annual Meeting for the Global Research Council

24 – 27 May 2021

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

HEALTH SYSTEMS RESEARCH: Lab Technician (2 positions)

Closing Date: 15 April 2021

HEALTH SYSTEMS TRUST (FRESH): Research Nurse

Closing Date: 20 April 2021

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