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| **STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE for Nigeria PreP Study** | | |
| **Study Site:** | | **SOPs Number** :SA-102 |
| **Title**  **COUPLE COUNSELLING** | | |
| **Version Number**: | **Version Date:** | **Effective date**: |
| **Approval name Signature Date** | | |

**Annual Review**

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| **Review date** | **Revision Date** | **Signature** |
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**Document History**

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| 1.0 | Initial release | 28th March 2015 |
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1. **Introduction**

Most new HIV infections in sub Saharan Africa are acquired from cohabiting heterosexual partners. Couple counselling is recognized as an important and effective intervention in which the two clients are counselled and provided with HIV test results as a couple. This encourages the couple to start planning for their future and discuss a realistic risk reduction plan that they can implement together. In situations where the couple refuses to receive services together, they can be counselled and receive results separately and then encouraged to disclose results to each other. Preventing HIV transmission from the infected couple requires first knowing the HIV status of the partners before initiating any prevention strategy.

1. **Objectives**

To establish a standardized operating procedure for HIV couple counselling in the Nigerian Prep Study.

1. **Responsibility**

Study counsellors are responsible for providing HIV couple counseling in accordance with this SOP. The PI/Site coordinator is responsible for training counseling staff to provide HIV couple counseling in accordance with this SOP and for providing day-to-day oversight and support to counseling staff to ensure that this SOP is followed. The PI is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all applicable study staff follows this SOP.

1. **Definitions**

* **Couple**: Two persons in an ongoing sexual relationship; each of these persons is referred to as a “partner” in the relationship.
* **Opt-out approach.** The study will offers HIV testing on an opt-out basis to all clients within the study. The client is informed of his/her right to refuse an HIV test that is routinely recommended and provided to each client.
* **Couples HIV testing and counselling**: When two or more partners are counselled, tested and receive their results together. When couples receive their results together, there can be mutual disclosure of HIV status, and the couple can receive appropriate support and be linked to follow-up services by a counsellor, health care provider or community-based worker.
* **Partner testing**: Another strategy for increasing knowledge of HIV status and disclosure among partners is partner testing. This is when one partner has already been tested, and the other partner is then tested separately. This would be a common scenario in antenatal settings, where women are routinely offered HTC and then encouraged to bring in their partner for partner testing. Partner testing may occur with or without disclosure. Whenever appropriate and feasible, however, mutual disclosure of HIV test results under the guidance of a counsellor should be encouraged and facilitated. In this document partner testing with mutual disclosure is considered a form of CHTC.
* **Standard protocol of counselling.** Counselling in the study centres will follows the Nigerian national HIV counselling and testing Guidelines and records are maintained according to the SOP. All counselors must abide to the ethical standards of counselling. Depending on the need, nature and wish of the clients, individual, group or couple counselling is offered, and sessions usually last about 40 minutes to one and half hours.
* **Confidentiality.** All the information collected is kept confidential and is not shared with anyone without the consent of the client. All staff of the study handling records and those who may deal with the clients' personal files must sign an oath of Confidentiality. Breaching the oath may result in official as well as other action against the staff member.

**4. Procedures**

The study will enroll HIV-infected individuals and their partner. Positive persons are generally expected to be referred to the study after having undergone HIV counseling and testing outside of the study. However, it may be necessary for study staff to perform HIV testing confirm infection (see Nigerian National HIV testing and counselling guidelines). When study staff are required to perform HIV testing, all such testing will be performed in the context of pre-test and post-test counseling. All counseling will be provided in accordance with the Nigerian National policies and guidelines.

For this study, the term “risk reduction counseling” refers to counseling provided to HIV positive partner in the study to reduce their risk of re-infection and their risk of transmitting HIV to others. The risk reduction counseling will be provided as part of the pre- and post-testing counseling as in the national HIV testing and counselling Guidelines, and will additionally be provided to any participant upon her/his request. .

Condoms will be provided to all participants free of charge throughout their participation in the study, and risk reduction counseling will include information/education as well as skills building on condom use and condom negotiation strategies as needed for each participant.

Counseling will also include HIV/AIDS education, discussion of disclosure issues and emotional support, discussion of healthy living strategies, discussion of stressors and potential strategies to address these, and provision of referrals, as applicable to each participant. When applicable, counselling will also address the benefits of HIV counselling and testing for other members of the family.

**The Counselor will;**

1. Assure that each person has given his/her consent for counselling and testing and is aware that he/she is expected to disclose the test results to the partner.
2. Meet with each to determine if there are any issues between the partners such as a history of violence that may make disclosure difficult or the use of coercion with regards to testing.
3. Conduct pre–test counselling either with the couple together or individually. Risk assessment must be done individually, in order to accurately assess risk.
4. First provide test results individually, and then assist a member of the couple to share the test results with his/her partner.
5. Counsel, encourage, and assist individuals who are reluctant to disclose their test results to their partners.
6. Disclose an individual test result only with the client's permission.
7. After the disclosure of the test results, proceed with post-test counselling with both partners present according to national guidelines.

**HIV serocordant couple**

For couples who were found both positives should be referred to the HIV treatment clinic. The Site coordinator must ensure that they are linked to the services. The receipt of the service must be expressly document in their records.

**HIV serodiscordant couple**

Couple found to have HIV discordant results should be referred to the PI/Site coordinator for recruitment into the study. Before referral to the PI, counsellors must provide HIV prevention counselling for the couple and this should be documented.

**This SOP has been read and understood by:**

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