

Nyla Lyons, Belinda White, Isshad John, Gregory Boyce, Jeffrey Edwards

Medical Research Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago

lyonsweb1@gmail.com

BACKGROUND

The Medical Research Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago (MRFTT) is the largest HIV treatment facility in the country accounting for ~ 75% patients on antiretroviral therapy (ART) nationally. With the announcement of the first confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 in Trinidad and Tobago, the MRFTT began implementing Telehealth services. The program addresses the psychological and health needs of patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, while reducing the risk of exposure for clinicians and patients.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A list of patients is collated called in advance of their scheduled appointments. Patients are screened for COVID-19 risk factors over the phone by trained social workers and clinic staff. Patients expressing psychosocial challenges related to their HIV disease and/or COVID-19 receive appropriate counselling. Patients identified as having psychological distress are further referred to the psychologist for tele-therapy for further assessment and appropriate psychological interventions. Virtual consultations will commence in September, 2020.

RESULTS

During the period March – June 2020, the MRFTT successfully reached 80% of patients scheduled for their routine clinical visits via telehealth assisting to refer stable patients, those virally unsuppressed and others for appropriate care; 30% of patients were further referred for tele-therapy. Telehealth improved access for patients with transportation difficulties, those with challenges accessing in-person care, and vulnerable patients experiencing stigma.

CONCLUSION

Telehealth is a critical clinical response during the COVID-19 pandemic and the MRFTT is able to maintain care for PLHIV to reduce the risk of exposure for COVID-19 infection and therefore limiting the potential for community spread of infections.