Couples HIV Counseling and Testing (CHCT)

Participant's Manual

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Couples HIV Counseling and Testing Intervention and Curriculum

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Michael Iatesta and the VCT Team identified the important role that Couples HIV Counseling and Testing (CHCT) could play in HIV prevention. He convened a consultation of experts and researchers in Atlanta, Georgia, in August 2002 to review the scientific basis for couples counseling and to identify the critical issues to be considered in developing a counseling and testing intervention for couples. The following persons contributed to this meeting:

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Foreword

The *Couples HIV Counseling and Testing (CHCT) Intervention and Training Curriculum* was developed in response to increased demand from field partners for interventions and training that would help them address the complex issues related to HIV counseling and testing (HCT) with couples. The materials are intended to guide trainers and participants through a general course covering essential topics and activities for the CHCT provider. By addressing CHCT technical content, and counseling and communication skills through learning exercises and hands-on practice, the materials aim to increase the skills of counselors who provide HCT to couples. Working with couples can be challenging and complex, even for the most experienced counselor. This manual was developed to address the challenges faced by these counselors in the field.

The goal of this manual is to guide trainers in training HIV prevention counselors to conduct CHCT sessions. The modules outlined in the curriculum will build upon the existing counseling skills of HCT providers so that they may help individuals in a couple understand the results of their HIV tests, as well as the importance of preventing all of their partners from becoming infected with HIV.

CHCT has emerged as an important intervention aimed at preventing the transmission of HIV between sex partners, and cohabiting or married couples. HIV prevention counselors can assist couples by:

1. Providing clear and accurate prevention messages tailored to the couple's life stage and reasons for seeking HCT services
2. Mitigating tension and diffusing blame
3. Dispelling myths about HIV transmission
4. Creating an environment that is safe for disclosure of HIV status among partners; and
5. Discussing options for disclosure of HIV status to the couple's children, and thinking through appropriate next steps for testing children, when necessary.

The materials found in this intervention and curriculum package were designed for experienced HIV prevention counselors currently working in HCT sites, regardless of whether they have prior experience counseling couples or not. This manual is not intended for HCT providers in health facilities such as prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) sites or tuberculosis (TB) clinics. Couples HIV counseling and testing is an important intervention in these settings, however, and an abbreviated version of the CHCT intervention found in this manual will be optimal for those who will provide HCT services in these sites and settings.

Persons planning to utilize these materials should note that the audience for the training should not be persons who are new to HIV testing and counseling, but rather should be persons with experience providing counseling or with a baseline of clinical skills.

The materials, instructional design, and formatting of this training package were field tested in South Africa, Kenya, and Botswana in 2004. In January 2006, the final field test was conducted in Kenya. These materials were also used in CDC-led trainings conducted in Botswana, Malawi, and Ethiopia in 2005, in Namibia in 2006, and in Nigeria in 2007. Local co-trainers and participants in early pilot tests of this manual provided valuable feedback that was used to strengthen these training materials.

As with any training package developed for use in a variety of countries, it will be necessary to review this document and tailor it based on the country's HIV counseling and testing policies and guidelines; current treatment availability; local and regional realities; cultural norms of couples seeking HCT services; and current and future foreseeable trends in HIV prevention, care, treatment, and support. Although these materials were designed primarily for use in international settings, they may also be adapted for use with couples in the United States.

Several countries have introduced policies and HCT guidelines supporting and promoting CHCT. As a response to the growing demand for these services, some countries have already met with key local partners, adapted earlier drafts of these materials, and begun implementing CHCT trainings.

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Abbreviations

AIC	AIDS Information Center
AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
ARV	antiretroviral (drug)
CDC	United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CHCT	couples HIV counseling and testing
CITC	client-initiated testing and counseling
FP	family planning
HCT	HIV counseling and testing
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IAVI	International AIDS Vaccine Initiative
IGA	income generating activity
LSTM	London School of Tropical Medicine
PEPFAR	United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PITC	provider-initiated HIV testing and counseling
PMTCT	prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission
PSF	Project San Francisco (Rwanda)
PWP	Prevention with Positives
RZHRG	Rwanda-Zambia HIV Research Group
STI	sexually transmitted infection
TB	tuberculosis
VCT	voluntary counseling and testing
ZEHRP	Zambia-Emory HIV Research Project (Zambia)