

LEVERAGING THE HIV PLATFORM FOR HYPERTENSION CONTROL IN UGANDA.



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WELCOME REMARKS FROM PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, PI

Welcome to this edition of the Integrated HIV/HTN newsletter, where we bring you updates on two exciting milestones in our journey to improve healthcare for individuals living with HIV and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Uganda.

In July, we witnessed groundbreaking moments at the Young Investigators Research Symposium, where Dr. Mucunguzi Atukunda shared the promising results of our Integrated HIV/HTN Study. Our findings on blood pressure control among HIV patients showcased the transformative impact of integrating hypertension management into routine HIV care. With a remarkable 33% improvement in blood pressure control and significant gains for patients with severe hypertension, this research underscores the power of comprehensive, patient-centered approaches to healthcare. It was a proud moment for our team and a step forward for healthcare innovation in Uganda.

Moreover, our recent training for over 100 health workers in Mbarara marked a pivotal chapter in strengthening healthcare across Western Uganda. This hands-on training equipped health workers with the skills to manage HIV and hypertension together, ensuring that our communities receive the holistic care they deserve. The enthusiasm and commitment displayed by participants reaffirmed the urgent need for integrated care, and I am confident that the skills and tools they have acquired will make a lasting impact in their communities.

As we move forward, let us continue to champion integrated healthcare models that address the evolving challenges of HIV and hypertension. Together, we are shaping a brighter, healthier future for all.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication.

Principal Investigator, Jane Kabami

PROJECT UPDATES

Breakthroughs in Blood Pressure Control for HIV Patients: Dr. Mucunguzi Presents Integrated HIV/HTN Study at the Young Investigators Research Symposium

On July 10th, 2024, the Young Investigators Research Symposium in Uganda became the epicentre of excitement and innovation as scientists, both budding and seasoned, gathered to share ground-breaking research. Among the standout presentations was Dr. Mucunguzi Atukunda's insightful findings on blood pressure control for HIV patients, a highlight of the Integrated HIV/HTN Study. His research promises new hope for individuals with hypertension living with HIV, showcasing the power of integrated care.

A Grand Opening to a Promising Symposium

The symposium kicked off with an enthusiastic welcome from Professor Moses Kanya, Executive Director of the Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC). His words set the tone for a day filled with inspiring discussions, acknowledging the importance of young and senior researchers collaborating to shape the future of medical research.

He commended the event's organising committee for curating a significant platform for knowledge exchange, promising the symposium would return in 2026.

"Mentoring is more noble than conducting research," Professor Kanya remarked, highlighting the invaluable role of seasoned scientists in guiding the next generation of researchers.

Revolutionizing Care: The Integrated HIV/HTN Study

Dr. Mucunguzi's research captivated the audience by demonstrating how seamlessly integrating hypertension care into routine HIV treatment could lead to remarkable health outcomes.



Dr Mucunguzi Atukunda demonstrates the transformative potential of integrated HIV and hypertension care models in Uganda, achieving remarkable reductions in blood pressure among adults living with HIV. This approach is closing healthcare gaps and improving outcomes nationwide

The study revealed a 33% improvement in blood pressure control among HIV-positive patients who received integrated care.

Moreover, it highlighted a 70% success rate in severely affected individuals, many of whom had struggled with uncontrolled hypertension before the study.

The results for patients with stage 2 hypertension were even more astounding—74% achieved significant reductions in their blood pressure. These figures underscore the power of effectively combining resources and expertise to tackle dual health challenges

How It Worked: A Patient-Centered Approach

The Integrated HIV/HTN Study's success was attributed to a holistic model prioritising patient accessibility and healthcare worker empowerment. Key elements included:

A Vision for the Future

"Even modest reductions in blood pressure can lead to substantial gains in preventing vascular diseases," emphasised Dr Mucunguzi, reinforcing the broader implications of his work.

His presentation inspired attendees and laid a roadmap for healthcare systems worldwide to adopt integrated care models.

As his findings continue to ripple through the medical community, they serve as a reminder of what's possible when innovation and patient-centred solutions align. Dr Mucunguzi's work is more than a study—it's a lifeline for countless individuals, proving that brighter days lie ahead for those managing both HIV and hypertension.

- Training frontline health workers to screen and manage hypertension during routine HIV care.
- Enhancing data management through Health Management Information System (HMIS) tools.
- Increasing hypertension screening rates in HIV clinics.

By streamlining care, the study proved that even modest interventions could yield profound results, paving the way for sustainable, life-saving improvements.

PROJECT UPDATES

Strengthening Healthcare in Western Uganda: A Revolutionary Approach to HIV and NCD Management

In an exciting leap forward for healthcare in Uganda, over 100 health workers from more than 20 health centres across Western Uganda came together in Mbarara for an innovative two-day training. This wasn't just another workshop—this event, hosted by the Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC) as part of the Integrated HIV/HTN project, represented a pivotal moment in Uganda's approach to managing HIV and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like hypertension and diabetes.

With Uganda facing an increasing burden of NCDs alongside its long-standing fight against HIV, this training aimed to equip healthcare workers with the skills to provide integrated, comprehensive care for both. And the results were nothing short of transformational.



Participants and trainers of the health worker training, organised by the Integrated HIV/HTN Study, gather for a group photo after a successful session aimed at enhancing healthcare delivery for HIV and hypertension patients.

Key Highlights

- **Extensive Training:** Over 100 health workers from 20+ health centers in Western Uganda attended a two-day training by IDRC.
- **Integrated Care Skills:** The training equipped participants to manage both HIV and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like hypertension and diabetes.
- **Practical Learning:** Experts taught hands-on skills such as blood pressure measurement and patient tracking using NCD registers.
- **Innovative HIV Platforms:** HIV care was highlighted as a strategic platform to address hypertension and improve healthcare delivery.
- **Vital Support:** Health centers received essential equipment, including blood pressure machines and NCD registers, to implement integrated care.

Integrated Care: The Future of Healthcare in Uganda

Dr Gerald Mutungi, Assistant NCD Commissioner at Uganda's Ministry of Health, opened the event with a powerful message: "Non-communicable diseases are becoming an urgent challenge, one that can no longer be ignored. By integrating NCD care into our HIV services, we can offer patients comprehensive, cost-effective care."

His words resonated with the crowd of health workers, many of whom already juggle multiple health crises daily. The concept of integrated care wasn't just a theory—it was a lifeline. Dr Mutungi emphasised that Uganda's healthcare system must adapt to meet these evolving challenges, and this training was the first step in that journey.

Hands-On Learning: Turning Theory into Practice

What made this training stand out? It wasn't just about listening to lectures—it was about rolling up sleeves and getting to work. Facilitated by experts like Uganda Heart Institute's (UHI) Elizabeth Arinitwe, the sessions included practical demonstrations on essential skills like measuring blood pressure, a crucial step in fighting hypertension, which is on the rise in Uganda.



Dr. Gerald Mutungi, Assistant NCD Commissioner at the Ministry of Health, addresses participants during the training session, stressing the importance of integrating Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) into healthcare practices and urging health workers to prioritize NCD management in their daily roles.

Participants learned how to use NCD cards and registers to accurately track patient progress, guided by Dr Brian Twinamatsiko. This hands-on-approach ensured that every health worker left the training ready to implement these practices in their own health centres, making an immediate impact on patient care.



Dr. Gerald Mutungi, Assistant NCD Commissioner at the Ministry of Health, presents essential items such as blood pressure machines and NCD registers to health facilities during the training session, aimed at strengthening the management of Non-Communicable Diseases in healthcare services.



Ms Jane Kabami, Principal Investigator of the Integrated HIV/HTN Study, presents data on the success of integrated care, highlighting its positive impact on patient outcomes.

Ms Jane Kabami, Principal Investigator of the Integrated HIV/HTN project, presented compelling data on the success of integrated care, demonstrating the real-world impact of this approach on patient outcomes. Her message was clear: integrated care is not just a good idea—it's a game-changer.

Dr Elijah Rutahaba from the Uganda Heart Institute further inspired attendees by introducing the innovative idea of using HIV care platforms to tackle hypertension. He called it a “game-changer” for healthcare delivery in Uganda—a bold strategy that could revolutionize care for countless patients.



Dr Elijah Rutahaba from the Uganda Heart Institute (UHI) introduces the innovative concept of using HIV care platforms to address hypertension, describing it as a game changer for healthcare delivery in Uganda and a bold strategy that could revolutionize care for many patients.

Insightful Leadership and Local Wisdom

The training also brought together top health experts who shared invaluable insights. Dr Peter Ssebutinde, Mbarara’s District Health Officer, spoke directly to the health worker’s hearts: “As health workers, we often put ourselves last. But we cannot pour from an empty cup. Regular check-ups and self-care are vital.” His message was a powerful reminder that the well-being of health workers is essential to providing the best care to their patients.



Dr Peter Ssebutinde, District Health Officer of Mbarara, addresses health workers during the training, emphasizing the importance of self-care and urging them to prioritize their own health with regular check-ups.

Breaking Down Barriers and Building Community

Throughout the two days, participants engaged in vibrant discussions, learning from each other’s experiences and deepening their understanding of NCDs like hypertension, diabetes, and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). One particularly impactful session, led by Dr Elijah, debunked common myths about these conditions, arming health workers with the knowledge to better serve their communities.



Health workers participate in practical sessions, receiving guidance on proper techniques for measuring hypertension as part of the training.



Elizabeth Arinaitwe from the Uganda Heart Institute guides health workers on proper techniques for measuring hypertension during a hands-on training session.

A New Chapter for Healthcare in Uganda

As the health workers returned to their centres, they carried with them more than just new skills. They left with a renewed sense of purpose and the knowledge that they were part of something bigger: a revolution in healthcare delivery. This integrated approach to managing HIV and NCDs ensures that patients receive holistic care, addressing multiple health needs in one setting.

This training, hosted under the integrated HIV/HTN project, represents a major shift in how Uganda's healthcare system can meet the needs of its people. By empowering health workers to integrate HIV and NCD management, we are not only addressing today's health challenges but building a stronger, more resilient healthcare system for the future.

As the training drew to a close, Ms Kabami left the participants with a powerful call to action: "You now have the tools to transform your communities. Use them." And these tools weren't just figurative—health centres received vital equipment such as blood pressure machines and NCD registers, symbolizing the tangible support behind this new approach to healthcare.



Health workers participate in a practical session on accurately filling out NCD cards, and registers for hypertension, enhancing their record-keeping skills for better patient management.

With the support of organisations like IDRC and the dedication of health workers across the country, Uganda is on the path to a healthier tomorrow—where integrated care becomes the standard, and no patient is left behind.

Together, we're transforming healthcare, one health centre at a time.



Photo
MEMORIES

March-August 2024



Highlights on progress for this Project Year

Towards Hypertension Control in Uganda

8

Implementation Science Journal clubs conducted.

52

Health facilities supported with HTN drugs.

26

Health facilities supported with at least 2 mentorship sessions.

52

Health facilities supported with blood pressure machines

52

Health facilities supported with Health Management Information System (HMIS) tools from MOH