



Success Story

In Malawi, Model Wards Introduce Nursing Students to HIV Clinical Practice

In the early 1960's, Malawi's National School of Nursing operated a model ward at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital where nursing students developed critical clinical skills by working directly with patients. With decreased investment in nursing education and a diminishing healthcare workforce, the model ward faded from use in the 1970s.



Students perform a routine check-up on a patient in the model ward.

In 2011, ICAP began working with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and Mzuzu University (MZUNI) to reintroduce the model ward as a cornerstone of nursing education in Malawi.

Today, in Malawi, where there is a high burden of HIV, nurses provide between 60 and 80 percent of direct patient care and play a vital role in the provision of treatment. Nurses need to be prepared to manage acute and chronic medical conditions, including HIV, and they must learn an array of essential skills in order to provide comprehensive, quality care. To acquire these skills, nurses spend almost two years—more than half of their education—in real-world clinical settings working with patients. Unfortunately, these opportunities are limited, and facilities often lack the human and financial resources needed to properly train students.

To provide nurses improved opportunity to acquire key clinical skills, ICAP's Nursing Education Partnership Initiatives received support from PEPFAR through HRSA to collaborate with the MOH and MZUNI to evaluate and re-establish model wards at four hospitals: Kasungu District Hospital, Mzuzu Central Hospital, Ntcheu District Hospital, and Zomba Central Hospital. Two hospitals primarily serve TB and HIV patients, and two specialize in surgical procedures. In these hospital settings, students observe ART initiation, work directly with HIV-positive pregnant women, and apply nursing practices to the day-to-day care of HIV patients.

"Both types of hospitals are important places for the creation of model wards," said Massiye Nyang'wa, program nursing officer at ICAP in Malawi. "Surgical wards have a strong link to HIV patients, as many patients seek treatment to deal with side effects of immunosuppression caused by antiretroviral treatments."

To evaluate the feasibility of model wards at the four hospitals, ICAP and its partners conducted an assessment that looked at five critical areas: staffing levels; capacity to offer clinical training; supervision and mentorship; monitoring and evaluation; and availability of resources and equipment. The assessment revealed a large disparity between what students learn in clinical teaching wards and how ideal procedures should be. Hospitals lacked adequately trained staff, and vacancies meant most students were taught by nurse midwife technicians, who have fewer qualifications. There were no student assessment mechanisms in place, students were not familiar with infection prevention standards, and essential medical supplies were lacking.

"Things were always in short supply or simply unavailable," said Jacqueline Kachere, a nursing student at Zomba Central Hospital. "Before the model ward, we had to improvise all the time."

To address these challenges, ICAP used three interventions: supporting training of instructors for the model wards and developing guidance materials; assisting MZUNI in the supportive supervision of instructors in model wards; and providing supplies and equipment to model wards.

"Model wards should give student the important skills they need to be effective nurses," said Shilela Bandazi, nursing director at the Ministry of Health Malawi. "I remember they were very powerful learning environments, when I was a nursing student."

ICAP also developed a six-week training curriculum in HIV services provision and trained 67 nurses as preceptors, who could lead trainings at MZUNI. In addition, ICAP supported the orientation of 90 nurse midwife technicians to clinical training, increasing the number of NMTs equip to train nursing students in the model wards.

ICAP's monitoring and evaluation officers provided technical assistance to MZUNI to conduct regular supportive supervision to model wards and established forums for tutors and clinical staff in all regions of Malawi to share progress on clinical students.

"I am very satisfied with teaching in this ward because I was able to learn procedures in the recommended way," said Joseph Yusufu, who is training at Zomba Model Ward. "I am becoming more competent in most of the procedures because there is proper guidance, support, and resources to assist us with learning the skills."

Today, over 540 nursing school graduates have benefitted from the four ICAP-supported model wards in Malawi. ICAP and its partners are demonstrating that hands-on clinical training is a critical step in nursing education and equipping nurses to face the challenges posed by HIV and other chronic diseases. With model wards, nursing students graduate ready to support the scale up HIV care and treatment efforts in Malawi and support lasting gains towards an AIDS-free generation.

This work has been supported by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) under the terms of the Global Nurse Capacity Building Program, cooperative agreement #U92HA12772. The contents are the responsibility of ICAP and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Government.