SYNDROMIC CASE MANAGEMENT OF STD

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

A Guide for Decision-makers, Health Care Workers, and Communicators

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC
MANILA 1997
This brochure introduces you to a new approach to caring for people with curable sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). We hope this information will help you to make decisions in favour of using this approach. These decisions may affect health care plans, budgets, public opinion, or the way health workers serve patients. Whatever your role, we invite you to support this practical approach to improving the STD care available in your community.

Seven Summary Points

- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are common and when they are not treated, they can cause serious health problems. STDs also increase the chances of getting infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
- The Syndromic Approach delivers effective STD treatment quickly to people when they first come for care.
- The Syndromic Approach is ideal for primary health care settings.
- The Syndromic Approach focuses on the most common STDs that can be cured.
- The Syndromic Approach is "user-friendly" because it offers medical care that patients can appreciate and get to easily.
- Complete STD care includes patients education, condom promotion and encouraging the sexual partners of STD patients to come for treatment. These aspects are always included as part of the Syndromic Approach.
- A proper supply of STD drugs and training programmes for health care workers are essential for improving STD care.

What are sexually transmitted diseases?

They are infections passed during sexual contact.

There are over 20 different STDs including syphilis and gonorrhoea. HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is also one of them. STDs are commonly passed from one person to another during sexual contact but they also can be passed from mother to child during pregnancy, during birth or while breast feeding.

Why are STDs a concern?

STDs are linked to AIDS.

When someone is infected with an STD, they are more likely to get infected with HIV through sexual contact. Proper treatment of curable STDs can reduce HIV transmission, and therefore AIDS, by nearly one half.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Problems with STD Care</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>STD services are frequently provided through specialized clinics. People who think they have an STD find it difficult to use these services. This can be because they are afraid of being identified as an STD patient or because services are expensive, difficult to get to or time consuming to use.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Treatment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>STD drugs may not be available quickly after a diagnosis is made. Sometimes people who think they have an STD prefer to obtain treatment by going directly to pharmacists or drug sellers. This can mean they take inappropriate drugs. In other cases, they take the proper drug but in insufficient doses. This encourages the development of germs that can resist treatment.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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<td>Health care workers do not always dedicate time to talk about the need to use condoms or the ways to prevent future infection by changing behaviour.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Treating partners</strong></td>
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<td>Giving treatment to partners of STD patients is necessary to stop infection from being passed in the future. But this is not easy because patients often do not want to tell their partner or they are not able to contact their partner. Partners also may not want to come for treatment because they are fearful or ashamed.</td>
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</table>

STDs are common.
There are as many as 30 million STD infections occurring each year in the Western Pacific Region alone. People who have several sexual partners and who do not use condoms regularly, have more chances to become infected with STDs.

**STDs cause serious health problems.**

Infertility in both men and women is the most common problem caused by STDs. Women can also experience problems with pregnancy such as abortion and premature birth. An STD infection in the mother can affect newborn children causing serious handicaps such as blindness.
Syndromes are the basis of a diagnosis.

STD syndromes are a way to group together infections which cause similar signs and symptoms. Simple flow charts have been developed to help health care workers use the Syndromic Approach to make a diagnosis.

Syndromic Approach focuses on common STDs.

The most common of the curable STDs are syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, chancroid, trichomoniasis and candidiasis.

Syndromic Approach is appropriate for primary health care settings.

Syndromic Approach is high quality STD care because it treats people who may have more than one STD infection with the most effective drugs available. Also, people with STDs are treated at the time of their first visit to a health care facility. Even if drugs cost more, treating in this way is less expensive in the long run because more people are cured the first time they come for care.

Treatment for multiple infections is built into the approach.

Approximately 6 out of every 10 STD patients have two or more different infections at the same time. With the Syndromic Approach, multiple infections are considered from the beginning and patients are given effective drugs.

Syndromic Approach delivers care that patients value.

Syndromic Approach puts an emphasis on rapid treatment. It also helps improve services so that patients will get effective treatment and will be more comfortable using the service again.
Why is Syndromic Approach always combined with patient education? What are the public health reasons for using the Syndromic Approach?

Patient education is part of delivering effective care.

A dialogue between health care workers and patients helps patients complete their STD treatment. It also helps patients decide to use condoms, change their risky sexual behaviour and convince their partner to get treatment.

Rapid care is a priority.

We know that treating curable STD soon after people have become infected limits future spread of STDs including HIV. This is because rapid treatment reduces the chances a person can get additional infections or infect other people. When rapid treatment is given to sexual partners of STD patients, it helps people to avoid getting the infection again from the same person.

Syndromic Approach makes effective STD care accessible to people.

Syndromic Approach is well-suited for primary health care services and even for rural health posts because it does not require a laboratory to be available. People who are concerned that they may have an STD can get care right in their own community.

Syndromic Approach does not depend on complicated laboratory test.

Many STD diagnostic tests are expensive. Some tests are also difficult to perform, require special laboratory training, or use sophisticated equipment. Syndromic Approach does not require the use of these tests which often are not available.

Syndromic Approach is suitable for many different types of health care workers.

It is easy for non-specialized health care workers to use flow charts to make a diagnosis and treat patients.
Syndromic Approach is a major change.

Health care workers may notice that there is less emphasis placed on identifying the cause of a particular STD. This change can be difficult for those who have been trained to seek out and identify the cause of disease. Yet both health care workers and patients will be satisfied with the quality of care when effective treatment is given more rapidly than is usually possible.

More attention is given to non-medical aspects of care.

An important part of the effort to control STDs is education about reducing the chances of future STD infection. Patient education should be a standard for all types of STD care.

The Syndromic Approach addresses this part of STD care by recognizing the valuable work of non-clinicians and the importance of working directly with people in the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STDs Using The Syndromic Approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urethral discharge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower abdominal pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vaginal discharge</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Men or Women</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Genital Ulcers</td>
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Communication skills are emphasized.

This is because health care workers who are comfortable talking with patients about sexual behaviour can obtain more complete and reliable information. They can use this information to help assess a patient’s level of risk, help make a diagnosis and as the starting point for patient education.
What is needed to promote the Syndromic Approach for STD care?

A sustained drug supply is top priority.

The availability of drugs is necessary to make it possible for STDs to be treated properly. Giving effective drugs and dosages also helps avoid the problem of antibiotics losing their power to combat infection. Patients will also value services more where they can cure their infection straight away.

Training for different types of health care workers is needed.

Several different types of health care workers who interact with STD patients will benefit from training in how to work as a team while using the Syndromic Approach. This can include physicians, physicians’ assistants, nurses, health educators, psychologists, or others.

Encouraging condom use is an element of STD care.

The best way to stay healthy is to abstain from having sex or remain with one sexual partner. But for some people, using condoms is a practical means of protection against STD that can fit into their lifestyle. Condoms are an effective barrier to STD infection during sexual contact.

Improving patient education benefits all types of STD services.

Efforts to improve the quality of communication and education are important in our efforts to control STDs. These efforts will also help make services more acceptable to people who think they have an STD.

Adapting the flow-charts.

The list of recommended drugs for STDs should be updated regularly when new information about the effectiveness of antibiotics is known and as new antibiotics are available.

Is Syndromic Approach the best option?

There are many settings where using Syndromic Approach can make a difference.

Syndromic Approach is ideal for situations when sophisticated laboratory diagnosis is either impractical or too costly. It is ideal for primary health care settings and can be used in many different types of clinics such as family planning or maternal and child health.