

Evidence Based Medicine in HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health Research: Piloting Two Distance Learning Courses in Low-Resource Settings

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Over the past decade there has been a growing demand for Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) in clinical care and research. Not only is there more evidence available in health care, but also more opportunities for this evidence to be used in effective interventions and to link it to research questions. The practice of EBM signifies the integration of individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research. The benefits of evidence based practice are many-fold: knowledge of latest clinical evidence empowers healthcare workers to make informed decisions regarding optimal care, and empowers health facilities' workers to demand relevant resources. In addition, the use of EBM enables those working with(in) health facilities and programmes in identifying gaps in research and in developing systematic strategies to address these gaps.

AFRICA BUILD (AB) is a Coordination Action to support the development of centers of excellence in health care, education and health research in African countries, using Information Technology. This project, developed under the 7th European Framework Programme (Grant Agreement no. 266474), consists of seven Work Packages (WPs). The Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp is leading WP6 which is tasked with developing a specific training program in HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health research in collaboration with the World Health Organization Department of Reproductive Health and Research (WHO/RHR), to be delivered via eLearning. The aim of this program is to enhance research and education in the above mentioned fields, via novel approaches and to identify research needs, emanating from the field. This pilot experience, which will be run both in English-speaking (Ghana), and French-speaking (Mali and Cameroon) partner institutions and produce targeted courses for strengthening research methodology and policy. Study materials will be available for the courses' participants through the AFRICA BUILD Portal and modules' content will be delivered via live webcasts.

Through the courses described above, the students will learn and apply the steps of EBM, from the definition of a specific clinical research question and the design of a search strategy till the interpretation of the evidence and the application of the latter to practice, linking the detected gaps to possible research topics within the fields of HIV/AIDS care and Reproductive Health. Moreover, the students will be engaged in virtual communities of researchers who can continue to develop research ideas, exchange information and knowledge regarding new tools and evidence, as well after the short lifespan of the project.

Keywords: distance learning courses, HIV/AIDS research, Reproductive Health Research, low-resource settings.