

Differentiated care delivery through telemedicine for PLHIV, Philippines

FINAL REPORT

SHIP

BACKGROUND

The Philippines has the highest percent of increase of new HIV cases in Asia and the Pacific region from 2010-2016 at 133%. (Vera, 2018) The healthcare system cannot keep up with the growing number of new infection, and reports show that not everyone is on medication, despite the WHO guidelines recommending treatment for all. People on antiretroviral therapy (ART) are mostly suppressed and resistance rates in the country are at 10%, but data is only available for three big hospitals, and may not be reflective of the national state. Retention in care is key to achieving viral suppression, but in a society where stigma is strong, and where religion and traditions influence judgement, accessing HIV-related healthcare services may be challenging. Barriers to accessing services at each step of the care cascade exist in the Philippines at the individual, community, and institution level. (Wijngaarden, 2015)

SHIP Clinic was established in 2013 as an HIV primary care clinic that has provides testing, laboratory facilities, medical consultation, and antiretroviral dispensing, with the aim to bridge gaps in the HIV healthcare system. The first of its kind: a stand-alone satellite clinic, built by community members familiar with health institution-related stigma, high prices, and limited operating hours as key barriers. It is in this spirit that SHIP clinic generates innovative ideas to bring HIV healthcare within reach of those who need it.

SHIP Clinic started to offer in 2014 ART refill delivery via courier service to clinically stable clients and as needed medical consultation via telemedicine (ART-EC). Clients from Metro Manila, Visayas and Mindanao have benefited from the ART refill delivery via courier service as well as telemedicine via popular messaging apps such as Skype, Viber and Zoom. Initially offered to clients who reside outside the city or abroad and to clients who cannot make their appointments and run out of ART due to unforeseen circumstances. This service has not been documented since its inception; fortunately the International AIDS Society Differentiated Service Delivery project provided such an opportunity to explore the benefits of ART-EC beyond distance medicine, and possibly provide an escape from the everyday crippling traffic in the Metro Manila area that presents another barrier to healthcare access.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project aimed to document, improve and test medical consultation via telemedicine and ART delivery service at SHIP. The documentation was done in two stages: first, lessons from the past implementation were culled from SHIP's clinic through documents review, interviews among clinic staff and reflection, then these were summarized and structured to create process flows. The documented past process flows were then improved based on telemedicine and courier service examples from other settings and on the experience of the clinic staff, with the aim of standardizing the procedures, roles and responsibilities. Consequently, a manual of operations was developed. The improved process was piloted from May-July 2018 in SHIP. The improved version of SHIP's medical consultation via telemedicine (ART-EC) and courier service is described in the following section.

ART-EC

Clinically stable patients are seen at the clinic every 6 months for routine consultation, laboratory tests and ART refills. On routine follow up, the clinic case manager offers to clients the option to have their next follow up schedule as an e-consultation. If the client opts for the telemedicine service and/or ART delivery via courier service, an appointment is set, and instructions are provided to clients on how to connect using Zoom. Clients are instructed to have their laboratory tests done before the scheduled e-consultation at the laboratory or diagnostic center nearest to them. Laboratory test requests are sent via email two weeks before the e-consultation. Clients are requested to send scanned copies of the test results as soon as they are out and before the scheduled e-consultation. The case manager then updates the clients' medical records.

The physician-on-duty is informed of any scheduled e-consultation by the clinic manager and conducts the e-consult at the clinic, as much as possible during clinic hours (which is from 2PM to 7PM every day except Thursdays and holidays) and as needed during the most convenient time for both clients and physician. Consults may be done even when the physician is outside the clinic, as long as the coordinator at the clinic opens a meeting room. The consults are documented using Connect for Life, SHIP Clinic’s electronic medical record system. Prescriptions, if needed, are sent to clients electronically, which they can present to the pharmacy for filling. Follow up consults are also set during the e-consult.

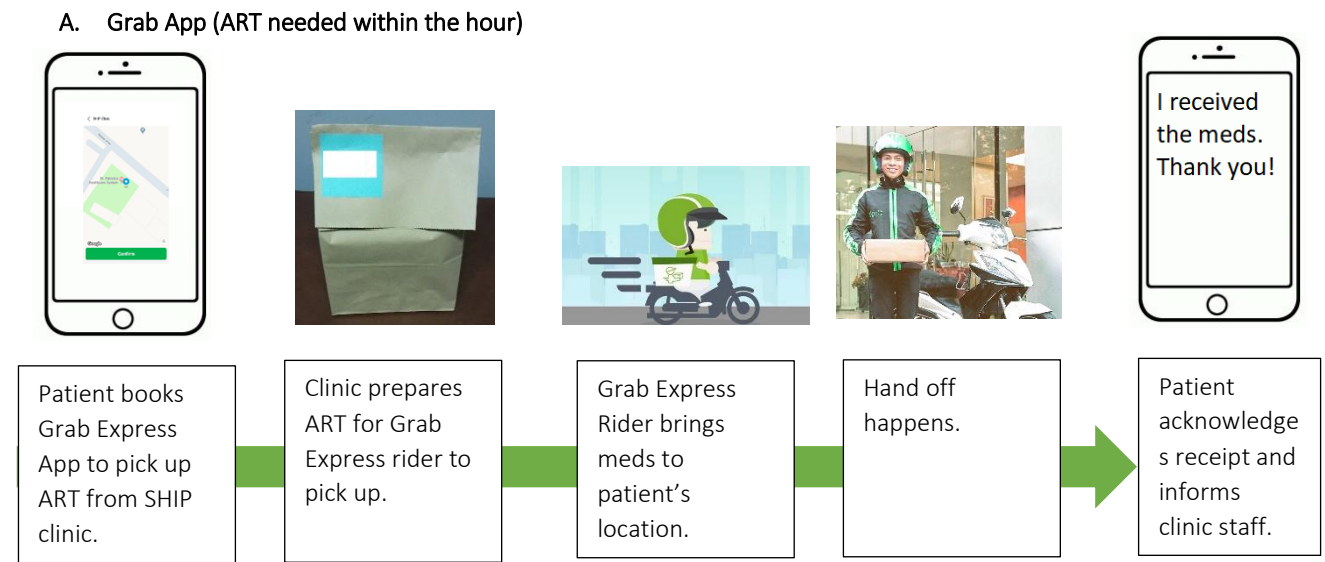
Clinically stable clients may also set or cancel an appointment for e-consultation through the 24/7 hotline. Customer service representatives plot appointments and cancellations in the clinic’s shared Google calendar. They are also responsible for making sure that new appointments for cancelled appointments are agreed with the clients and plotted in the Google calendar.

COURIER ART-EC: SHIP’s ART REFILL COURIER SERVICE

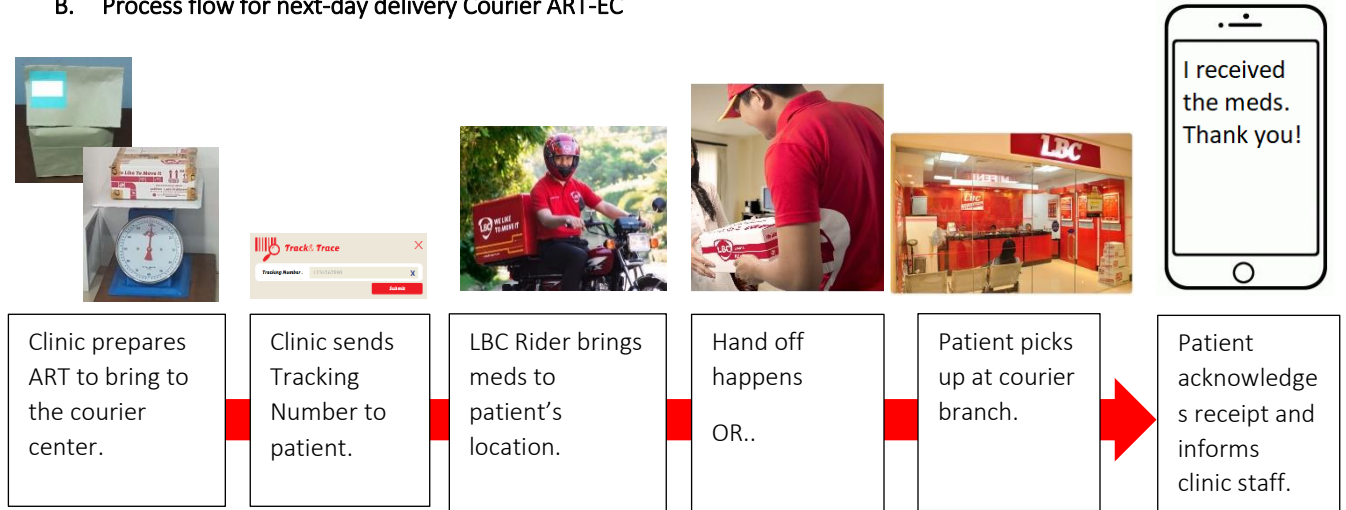
The ART refills are provided as out-of-facility individual model. ART refills are delivered at the clients’ registered address by a local courier service, or picked up at a courier branch of the client’s choosing. (Figure 1)

Feedback was elicited from clients via a Google Document Questionnaire. (Annex 1)

Figure 1. Process flows for Courier ART-EC

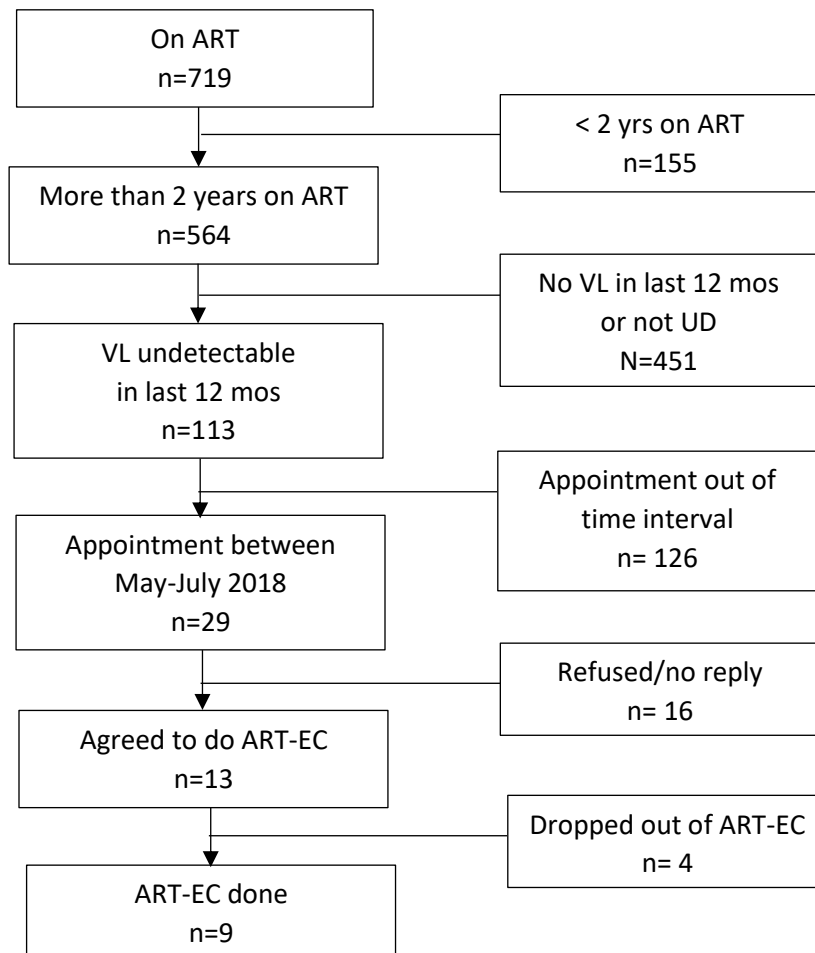


B. Process flow for next-day delivery Courier ART-EC



RESULTS

SHIP clinic had 719 clients on ART, of which 113 were eligible for the service. (Fig.1)

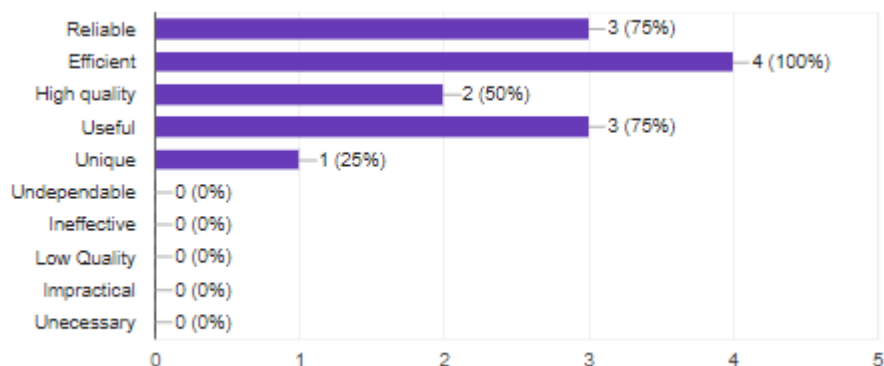


A total of 9 ART-EC were done from May-July 2018. ART-EC participants are too few to make any conclusions. Their characteristics represent the average SHIP Clinic patient: MSM, single, at least high school level of education, no medical issues currently. There was generally a good feedback from the participants of ART-EC, they found it efficient, reliable and useful. Other feedback responses are reported below. (Table 1)

Table 1. ART-EC participants' feedback

Feedback Questions	Response
Length of Time under SHIP care	2 - > 5 years
How well did ART-EC meet your expectations?	Extremely well (100%)
How responsive have we been to your concerns about ART-EC?	Extremely responsive (75%) Very responsive (25%)
SHIP adheres to professional standards	Strongly Agree (100%)
SHIP is making a positive contribution to my well-being .	Strongly Agree (100%)
What is the likelihood of partaking in this service again?	Very likely (100%)
Would you recommend this service to someone you know?	Yes (100%)
Overall, I am very satisfied with the way SHIP conducted this project.	Strongly agree (75%) Agree (25%)
Was your confidentiality compromised?	Yes (50%) No (25%) Maybe (25%)

Which of the following words would you use to describe ART-EC?



CHALLENGES

The openness of the clinic staff and clients to the idea of formally establishing the ART refill delivery service and telemedicine program is an important factor for the relatively modest success of this differentiated care model. While telemedicine is not new in the Philippines, this is possibly the first time that this service is formally offered to PLHIV. The past experiences of the SHIP clinic in providing similar services helped inform the establishment of protocols that the clinic staff should follow for the ART refill delivery service and telemedicine program.

Challenges seen at this point include confidentiality in medication delivery, self-sufficiency, and precision. Only those who are confident in receiving medications at their homes are able to engage in this service. If clients are not disclosed to people they live with, they are more likely to refuse the service. There is an option to pick-up refills at the courier branch nearest them if home delivery is not an option. Clients also need to be responsible in fulfilling laboratory tests requested of them prior or after the e-consultation. The coordinator must also be keen on the timing of contact with clients vis a vis their medication supply. The success of the program rests on time and cost efficiency.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STEPS FORWARD

Differentiated care is very much needed in the Philippines, where the healthcare system is struggling to catch up with the rate of new infections and fallouts occurring at each step of the care cascade. ART-EC is just one of the many venues where bringing access closer to the patient breaks down barriers, but also deals with the seemingly mundane issue of being stuck in Metro Manila traffic and wasting a whole day's worth of travel to the clinic. It has had some good feedback with the patients, but maintaining confidentiality all throughout the service should be better observed. It is also worthwhile to explore the long-term benefits of telemedicine and easier refills in the clinical outcome, quality of life, self-stigma and mental health, and retention in care of PLHIV in the Philippines. SHIP Clinic will plan to describe ART-EC's benefits after 3--5 years of experience, and provide interim reports to the local health ministry, to inform of the potential of this service in achieving patient retention in care, in the hopes that the a government-supported courier service or pop-up refill centers catering to all treatment providers can be established nationwide.

About You

A few questions about yourself.

What is your gender identity?

Male

Female

Transgender-Male

Transgender-Female

Other:

What is your date of birth?

What is your marital status?

Single

Married

Living as married

Separated

Divorced

Widowed

What is the highest education you received?

None at all

Primary School

Secondary School

Tertiary School

Post-Graduate Studies

Other:

Are you currently ill?

Yes

No

How much do you earn monthly?

Below P10,000.00

P10,000.01 to P20,000.00

P20,000.01 to P30,000.00

P30,000.01 to P40,000.00

Above P40,000.00

How would you rate your quality of life?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 Very Good

How satisfied are you with your health?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

To what extent do you feel that physical pain prevents you from doing what you need to do?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 An Extreme Amount

How much medical treatment do you need to function in your daily life?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 An Extreme Amount

How much do you enjoy life?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 An Extreme Amount

To what extent do you feel your life to be meaningful?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 An Extreme Amount

How well are you able to concentrate?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 An Extreme Amount

How safe do you feel in your daily life?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 An Extreme Amount

How healthy is your physical environment?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 An Extreme Amount

Do you have enough energy for everyday life?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 Completely

Are you able to accept your bodily appearance?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 Completely

Have you enough money to meet your needs?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 Completely

How available to you is the information that you need in your day-to-day life?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 Completely

To what extent do you have the opportunity for leisure activities?

Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 Completely

How well are you able to get around?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 Very Good

How satisfied are you with your sleep?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How satisfied are you with your ability to perform your daily living activities?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How satisfied are you with your capacity for work?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How satisfied are you with yourself?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How satisfied are you with your sex life?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How satisfied are you with the support you get from your friends?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How satisfied are you with the conditions of your living place?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How satisfied are you with your access to health services?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How satisfied are you with your transport?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

How often do you have negative feelings such as blue mood, despair, anxiety,depression?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always

About You and SHIP

This section is about your relationship with SHIP as your treatment care provider. This will also include questions about your overall experience with ART-EC.

How long have you been under SHIP's care?

1-2 years

2-3 years

3-4 years

4-5 years

Over 5 years

Other:

How well did ART-EC meet your expectations?

Extremely well Very well Somewhat well Not so well Not well at all

How responsive have we been to your concerns about ART-EC?

Extremely responsive Very responsive Somewhat responsive Not so responsive Not at all responsive

SHIP adheres to professional standards.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

SHIP is making a positive contribution to my well-being .

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What is the likelihood of partaking in this service again?

Very unlikely Unlikely Neither likely nor unlikely Likely Very likely

Would you recommend this service to someone you know?

Yes No Maybe

Overall, I am very satisfied with the way SHIP conducted this project.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Which of the following words would you use to describe ART-EC? Select all that apply

Reliable Efficient High quality Useful Unique Undependable Ineffective Low Quality
 Impractical Unnecessary

Was your confidentiality compromised?

Yes No Maybe

How much are you willing to pay for ART-EC? (both E-consult & Courier)

Actual cost only (clinic consult + courier to your location)
 Actual cost + Php 100 service fee
 Actual cost + Php 200 service fee
 Actual cost + Php 300 service fee
 Actual cost + Php 400 service fee
 Actual cost + Php 500 service fee

What did we do well?

What could we have done better?

Any suggestions?

ANNEX 2 – Pictures

Training of staff of the Service



Physician conducting an online Consultation at the Clinic



Preparation of the Medications for Delivery/Pickup, Handoff to Motorcycle Courier

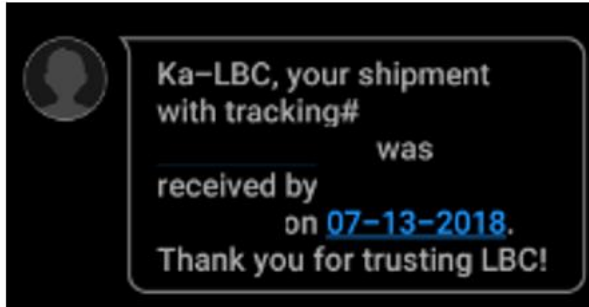


Sending Medications to Courier via the Local Branch



SMS indicating Package Delivery and Receipt

By Courier Branch Pickup



By Patient, through Motorcycle Courier

