

# Healthcare workers: A help or hindrance to obtaining microbicides in Southern Africa?

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## BACKGROUND

Recent CAPRISA 004 results indicate that antiretroviral containing microbicides are partially effective against HIV transmission. While we wait for a microbicide that can be made widely available, we wish to determine how microbicides will fare in the current healthcare market.

Since an effective microbicide is likely to contain an antiretroviral, it would be expected to be distributed through healthcare workers (HCWs). This study aimed to determine the opinions and feelings of potential end-users and their partners regarding obtaining HIV prevention products from healthcare workers.

## METHODS

Focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with South African and Basotho men and women living in rural and urban areas. Interviews were transcribed and data analysed using Atlas.ti version 5.2.

TABLE 1 SAMPLE SIZE

	Males		Females	
	FGDS	IDIs	FGDS	IDIs
South Africa	4 (27*)	12	5 (34*)	6
Lesotho	8 (54*)	18	11 (120*)	26

\*Indicates the total number of individuals who participated in the FGDs

## RESULTS

Many respondents stated that dissemination of information regarding microbicides, as well as dispensing of product, by HCWs would increase the credibility of the product and hasten its adoption and acceptance. It was felt that healthcare workers would be the best channel to use due to the clinical nature of the potential product and the complex nature of the messaging regarding usage and efficacy:

**“We would prefer to buy the product from clinics and pharmacies because we will be sure that their quality is guaranteed and that there will be nurses who will assist us with how it has to be used and one will also get the privacy to enquire more.”** – urban female, Lesotho

The need for confidentiality was also one area which respondents felt could be addressed if microbicides were available from health care workers.

**“They should be obtained from clinics because there are trained personnel and there is confidentiality.”** – rural male, Lesotho

**“I would prefer to obtain microbicides from (a clinic) because they keep changing staff and that makes me comfortable because no one gets to know a client very well and this leads to more privacy and less gossips.”** – urban female, Lesotho

However HCWs, particularly nurses, were identified as a deterrent to people wanting to go to a clinic and obtain information or products for HIV prevention. Many believe that nurses in the clinics have bad attitudes in general, and are described as **“angry nurses who always shout at people”**.

**“When the person thinks to go stand in the queue for the whole day, and eventually when you get to that nurse, they don’t even explain to you what is happening, they just give you an ointment without explaining...”** – urban male, South Africa

**“When I rang the bell to alert them that they have to help me they scolded me... we are very afraid of our nurses – they are very rude – extremely rude – and our doctors have no fixed working hours”** – urban male, Lesotho

**“...if you go to clinics, nurses are very difficult even just for contraceptives”** – rural female, South Africa

**“...there are always long queues of people waiting to be helped and very few people get the help that they need from our hospitals. People die in the queues to see the doctor...”** – urban male, Lesotho

## CONCLUSION

Many people in South Africa and Lesotho are not comfortable visiting healthcare facilities due to the poor reception they receive from HCWs. Despite this, most respondents indicated that they would still prefer to access a microbicide from a health care worker for reasons of assured quality of the product, gaining more information and confidentiality.

Regardless of potential scheduling of microbicides, HCWs are likely to be important in the dissemination of information and advice. It is essential that they are well prepared for the potential roll-out of microbicides. These preparations may need to include specialised training on microbicides and a regional awareness-raising programme focused on improving the attitudes of HCWs and attaining their buy-in. Consideration should also be given to supporting HCWs and improving their working conditions, to ensure their ability and willingness to deal with people looking to access microbicides.