



# 5th Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention

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## Poster Exhibition

### D8 - Impact and integration of services

#### **WEPED214 - Factors influencing children's uptake of HIV care and treatment in South Africa - a qualitative study of caregivers and clinic staff**

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**Background:** Despite antiretroviral rollout in South Africa in recent years, fewer children than expected are accessing HIV care services. Our objectives were to describe barriers and facilitators of children's uptake of HIV care.

**Methods:** Our study involved six private sector clinics which provide HIV care free-of-charge in collaboration with Aurum Institute for Health Research in and around Gauteng province, South Africa. In-depth interviews were conducted in July 2008 with 21 caregivers of children attending these clinics for HIV care, 21 clinic staff members (seven doctors, five nurses and nine lay counsellors), and three lead staff from affiliated daycare centres and an orphanage.

**Results:** Many children were only tested after being recurrently unwell. The main barriers reported were: i) *facility-related factors* - long queues, negative staff attitudes, missed testing opportunities at healthcare facilities and provider difficulties with paediatric counselling and venesection; ii) *practicalities* - lack of money for transport, food and treatments for opportunistic infections, poor access to welfare grants and lack of coordination amongst multiple caregivers; iii) *caregivers' fears and beliefs* - hopelessness, misperceptions about HIV, maternal guilt and fear of negative repercussions from disclosure. Lack of child-friendly facilities was not felt to be a major barrier. Facilitators were: i) measures taken by clinics to help with practicalities such as transport; ii) support from family and daycare centres/orphanages; iii) seeing children improve on treatment. Participants felt that better public access to accurate HIV information would facilitate uptake.

**Conclusions:** Poverty and the implications of children's HIV infection on their families underlie many of these factors. Whilst some staff-based issues and practicalities may be addressed with improved training and simple measures employed at clinics, changing caregiver attitudes may require interventions at both individual and societal levels. There is a potential role for healthcare providers in disseminating information and actively promoting testing of children.

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