

Terms of Reference – Individual Consultant

Summary

Title	Consultancy to conduct a Prospective ART Cohort Study for HIV patients enrolled in care and treatment in Liberia
Purpose	Recruitment of a consultant to establish and lead the conduct of a Prospective ART Cohort Study for HIV patients enrolled in care and treatment in Liberia
Location	Liberia
Duration	Maximum of 90 Working Days (In phase manner)
Start Date	June 2019
Reporting to	HIV National Technical Working Group

Background and Rationale

Assessment of long-term clinical outcome from treatment of HIV infection is of major importance to the patient community, health care provider, public health officials, etc. The median time from primary infection with HIV to the development of clinical disease (i.e. AIDS)-without drug intervention – is 10 years, and drug intervention in the asymptomatic phase will extend this period by several years. Thus, data from Randomized clinical trials (RCT's) using short term of follow-up, only provides a snapshot of which benefits (or lack of such) the patient may potentially experience from a therapy. Such trials highlight the potential short-term efficacy of regimens in terms of virological outcome, while observational studies can provide key data on long-term clinical outcome.

The primary supplement to the RCT's – to provide insight in efficacy and safety of drug interventions – are well-designed prospective cohort studies. Such studies can provide long-term follow-up on a large representative sample of patients followed in clinics, thereby providing information for immediate use by decision-makers as well as generating hypotheses on topics where uncertainties exist.

The first antiretroviral retention rate cohort study in Liberia was conducted in 2009 that investigated five standards outcomes of patients enrolled into HIV care and treatment over 6 and 12 month periods. The study results showed a retention rate of 19% of patients not eligible for treatment and 62% of those initiated on treatment at the end of 12 months, with about 60% of these losses occurring in the first 3 months of enrolment. Among the patients on ART, males recorded a higher LTFU rate of 30% compare to 26% among female at the end of 12 months. WHO clinical stage at baseline was highly associated with an increase LTFU rate for both patients on and not on ART. Adherence to therapy was a critical issue that was excluded from the analysis due to the incompleteness of the data.

The 2009 study recommended a follow up study to properly investigate the reasons and outcome of patients lost to follow up and an inclusive analysis of adherence to treatment. In 2013 and 2017, follow up studies were conducted and revealed some insight into reasons for LTFU along with recommendations to curtail further occurrences. Additionally, the 2013 IBBSS identified key population to have a high HIV prevalence; however, data about treatment uptake within

these population subgroup is unknown so far. Hence, this study is intended to take a prospective look and probe into these issues to properly shape the ART program in Liberia as opposed to previous retrospective studies conducted. The Liberian HIV cohort aims to focus on specific aspects of the Liberian epidemiology and to generate a close network between epidemiological, clinical and biological – particularly virological – expertise through Liberia.

Scope of Work

Currently there are about 187 health facilities across the 15 political subdivisions that are providing care and treatment to HIV positive patients; however, three counties have been defined as high burden areas hosting a little over 75% of the total patients in Liberia.

Goals and Objectives:

The objective of this study is to establish the effectiveness of treatment in Liberia and the impact of this treatment on mortality, morbidity, and the quality of life by instituting a system to collect long-term, prospective collection of clinical, laboratory and therapeutic data as well as biological samples on a large cohort of consecutive HIV infected patients from across Liberia in order to (1) determine the factors associated with the clinical, immunological and virological course of HIV infection and (2) continue to provide and develop a surveillance system to describe temporal changes in the clinical course of HIV including measuring retention and outcomes of patients.

Specific objectives will focus on:

1. The specificity of the Liberian epidemiological pattern of patients enrolling into care and ART in Liberia.
2. To determine treatment outcomes in terms of VL suppression
3. To determine the occurrences of opportunistic infections related to HIV
4. To assess treatment and care outcome in terms of retention, lost-to-follow-up, death and stopped treatment
5. Investigate and make appropriate recommendations for the improvement of care in Liberia

Key Activities and Tasks:

- Design a protocol commensurate with the aims and objectives of the study that meets international best standards.
- Identify and design appropriate tools that will be used to collect prospective/longitudinal data for enrolled patients in the study including electronic platforms where necessary
- Along with Principal investigators, train local staff on the standard operating procedures and protocol of the study
- Perform analysis and report writing for the first of cohort with a well-defined analysis plan for future reference
- Along with Principal Investigator, develop a comprehensive study budget covering the entire first year of the study and for additional follow-ups

Key Deliverables

1. Study protocol
2. Study Budget
3. Training of study participants

4. Analysis plan
5. First year cohort report

Desired competencies, technical background and experience

- BSc degree in relevant field (Public Health, Social Sciences) and MSc will be an added advantage
- At least 8 years' experience working on HIV/AIDS surveillance/research, preferably in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Proven experience of support to government and civil society in the development of strategies, plans, guidelines, tools and reports.
- Experience in engaging and/or leading consultations with national authorities in development of strategic documents, documentation and reporting processes
- Demonstrated ability to analyze and interpret programme longitudinal data and proven experience in developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks/plans as well as electronic data systems.
- Excellent written and spoken English required, as well as analytic, facilitation and presentation skills.
- Competencies required include: communication, working with people, drive for results, deciding and initiating action, relating and networking, applying technical expertise, creating and innovating, formulating strategies and concepts.

The consultant will be expected to produce copies of previous related work as evidence of competency, technical experience and references.

How to apply

- ✓ To apply for this consultancy, interested consultants should submit expression of interest together with: a cover letter, no longer than two pages, and curriculum vitae showing how the Consultant meets the required qualifications, experience and expertise.
- ✓ Submit a technical proposal or concept note, no longer than six pages, highlighting:
 - the methodology that the Consultant will use, including sampling, data collection methods and tools, data capturing, processing, analysis and interpretation;
 - the work plan, time frame with clear milestones;
 - the understanding of this Terms of References, its qualifications and any suggestions to improve this Terms of Reference;
 - accountabilities, logistics and resource requirements that will be needed;
 - any ethical concerns that could affect people involved in the study and
- ✓ Draft financial proposal/budget including all eligible fees, except the cost of the stakeholders' workshops, which will be covered directly by the Program.

All applicants interested in the TA positions are kindly asked to submit applications to:

**Human Resource Department
Attn: James M. Beyan, Human Resource Manager
Ministry of Health, Congo Town
Monrovia, Liberia
Ref: MOH/NACP/GF/Cohort/001/2019**

Or via email: proumohsw@gmail.com

ALL INTERESTED APPLICANTS SHOULD SUBMIT THEIR APPLICATION ON OR BEFORE THE Friday, May 31, 2019 at 2:00pm. Interested applicants can also access this vacancy on the Ministry's website: www.moh.gov.lr

A multi-disciplinary selection committee shall convene immediately upon the closure of the application window to review submissions. It should be noted that only shortlisted candidates shall be contacted for further interviews. The successful applicant shall be notified through a written notification letter or phone call.