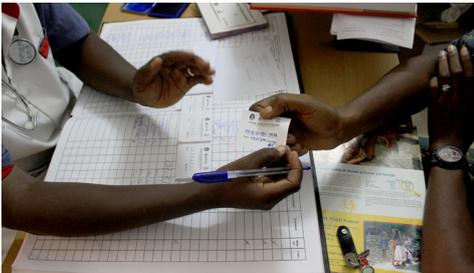




SUCCESS STORY

UNIQUE IDENTIFIER CODE: PROTECTION THROUGH ANONYMITY



This Unique Identifier Code card is given to the individual at the first visit.

Notice: This Success Story is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of FHI 360 and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government.

Imagine needing HIV treatment or prevention counseling but being afraid to go to a health services center because you knew it could result in stigma or even violence.

This was the reality for Kodjo*—a 31-year-old store manager in Lomé, Togo—and many of his friends, as men who have sex with men (MSM).

“Anonymity is important to me since MSM encounter severe stigma and discrimination every day, and I could even face criminal penalties or imprisonment under existing laws,” Kodjo said. “I also do not want my sexual orientation to be revealed to co-workers, family and friends before I am ready to come out openly.”

Kodjo is now part of a USAID-sponsored program that uses a Unique Identifier Code (UIC) to guarantee anonymity and increase precision in treatment of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). With the UIC card, individuals can visit any health services center to get treatment and advice without risk.

“I used to worry that the health services center might inadvertently disclose my name to someone, and it might soon be all over the place. Gossip spreads very quickly here,” he added with an embarrassed look. “I am happy now that I can have access to health care services without disclosing my identity. My friends and I do not hesitate any longer to seek treatment if we think that we may have an STI. The UIC is a real protection,” he said.

Kodjo’s sense of relief and satisfaction is an important gain for HIV prevention efforts. Men having sex with men are among the population segments most vulnerable to HIV infection. So, it is in the public health interest that they be encouraged to consult regularly with relevant health services for HIV testing and treatment, and follow-up if they are HIV positive.

“The UIC is my reliable friend,” Kodjo states. “I feel reassured about visiting a health care services center because I know that my sexual orientation will remain confidential from others.”

A UIC system protects anonymity even if patient-doctor confidentiality breaks down. At the first visit, the individual gets a UIC card for use at all later consultations. The code is culturally acceptable, anonymous, confidential, easy to replicate and consistent over time. The seven-digit alphanumeric UIC is derived from the patient’s gender, last two digits of the birth year, first letter of the last name, first letter of the first name, and first two letters of

“ The UIC is my reliable friend. I feel reassured about visiting a health care services center because I know that my sexual orientation will remain confidential from others. ”

the mother’s first name. The code generates the data needed to track usage of services, which helps improve service delivery and administration.

A UIC system protects anonymity even if patient-doctor confidentiality breaks down. At the first visit, the individual gets a UIC card for use at all later consultations. The code is culturally acceptable, anonymous, confidential, easy to replicate and consistent over time. The seven-digit alphanumeric UIC is derived from the patient’s gender, last two digits of the birth year, first letter of the last name, first letter of the first name, and first two letters of the mother’s first name. The code generates the data needed to track usage of services, which helps improve service delivery and administration.

A supervisor of peer educators at the Drop-in-Center (DIC) of Espoir-Vie Togo (EVT) in Lomé said, “It’s easy now. With the UIC database, we can determine the activities of key populations as well as the stocks we need of condoms, lubricants, referral forms and other materials for them.”

The governments of Burkina Faso and Togo have adopted the UIC system and want to implement it in all interventions targeting populations most vulnerable to HIV. All PACTE-VIH implementing partners have adopted it to help bring dignity and protection to people who often feel defenseless and isolated because of prejudice and violence.

UIC is a central tool of USAID’s five-year Regional HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Project (PACTE-VIH; 2012–2017), which provides support for the HIV prevention efforts of governments in Togo, Burkina Faso and other West African countries. The project, run by FHI 360, conducts targeted and versatile interventions that can be adapted and replicated across the West African region.

* not his real name