

# **Rapid overview of HIV testing in South Africa**

Southern African HIV Clinicians' Society Conference  
Cape Town  
26 November 2012

Marlise Richter

International Centre for Reproductive Health, Ghent University  
African Centre for Migration and Health, Wits University

# Rapid overview of HIV testing in South Africa



I get tested because I  
want to know my truth.



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the **Risk** is NOT  
knowing.  
Get **tested**.



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# VCT

- South Africa's mainstay has been VCT
- VCT = Voluntary Counselling & Testing
- Because of the discrimination faced by certain groups in the initial stages of the epidemic, international bodies and many public health authorities originally adopted a voluntary, client-initiated approach to prevent HIV
- With VCT, the focus is on
  - Testing with informed consent,
  - Counselling
  - Protection of confidentiality
  - Voluntary partner notification.



# Other forms or variations of HIV testing

- Provider-Initiated HIV testing
- Incentivised testing
- Self-testing
- Compulsory testing

# Compulsory HIV testing

- The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act of 2007 provides for victims of sexual offences, interested persons on their behalf, and investigating officers of the South African Police Service (SAPS) to apply to a magistrate for a court order to test an alleged sexual offender for HIV (McQuoid-Mason, SAMJ, 2009)
- Could find no information on the number of tests done in terms of this provision:
  - No response from “Victim Support and Specialized Services Dept of Justice & Constitutional Development”

# Self-testing

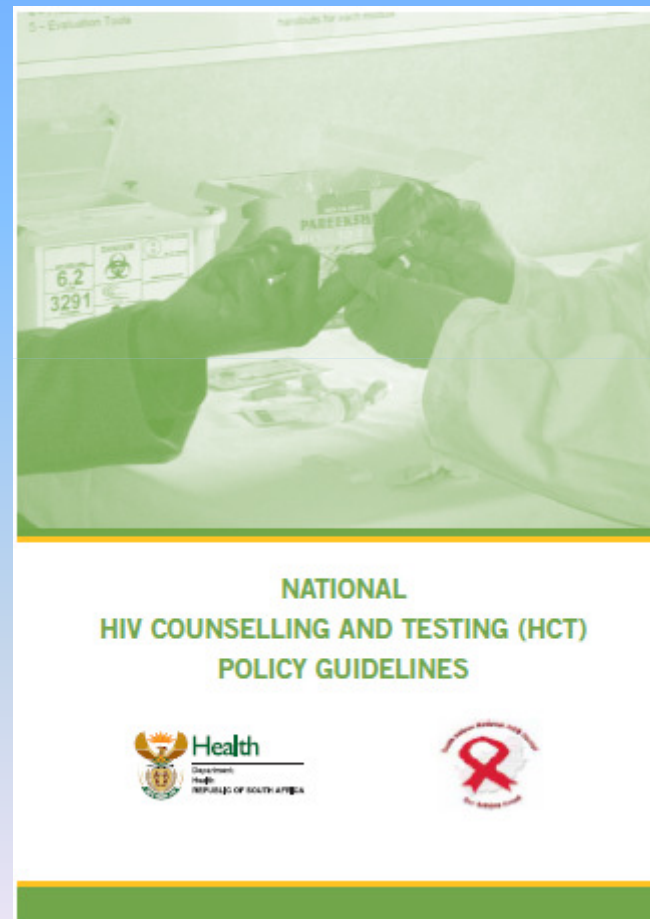
- Current law and policy inhibit the roll-out of accurate and well-regulated self-testing kits in South Africa, and create a loophole for sale in supermarkets, but not pharmacies.



# HCT

In Feb 2010, the  
“National HIV  
Counselling and  
Testing Policy  
Guidelines” were  
published

VCT expanded to include  
provider-initiated  
testing and counselling



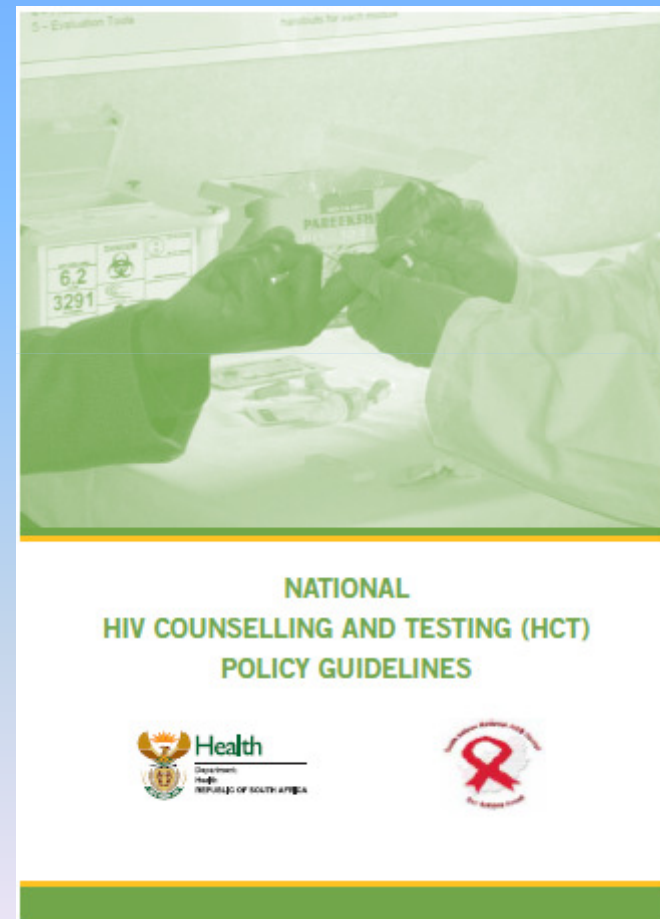
# HCT

“HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) has become increasingly available in South Africa in recent years. More than 4500 public health facilities are offering provider-initiated testing and counselling (PICT) also known as routine HIV testing (RT) and client-initiated counselling and testing (CICT) also known as VCT.

HCT is also offered through mobile services, as well as non-medical sites.

The National Department of Health’s HCT programme supports approximately 8000 lay counsellors with stipends; they provide HIV counselling at medical and non-medical sites.”

- Minister Aaron Motsoaledi





# HCT

- HCT campaign launched in March 2010
- 20 million people were tested for HIV during a year long testing campaign (Address by the Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa Kgalema Motlanthe at the Opening of the XIX International AIDS Conference, Washington DC, United States of America, July 2012)



# Joint Statement: How to improve HCT

- In 2012, health workers, counselling organisations, activists and the National Department of Health met in Hillbrow to discuss how to improve HIV testing and counselling.
- Joint Statement by the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society, Treatment Action Campaign, SECTION27, WITS Reproductive Health & HIV Institute, iTEACH and others on “How we can improve HIV testing and counselling”:
- Problems with the quality of counselling and testing.:
  - One study followed over 260 rapid test processes in the public health system. It found that less than 4% of these complied with guidelines.
  - Counsellors across the country are giving vastly different advice to patients and administering different HIV testing protocols of varying quality.
  - The poor quality of counselling and testing causes low rates of linkage to care after testing.
  - Counsellors should be provided a testing checklist or algorithm, along with effective training and support, to improve their ability to consistently convey the correct essential advice to clients.

# Joint Statement: How to improve HCT

- Quality of HIV tests
- Routine monitoring and evaluation of these tests should be performed at clinics and other rapid testing sites to ensure high levels of sensitivity and specificity.
- Regulate all medical devices to ensure their quality, safety and efficacy.
- The role of management
- Managers of health facilities are responsible for the quality of testing and counselling.
- Employment of counsellors by the Department of Health
- Counsellors working in the public health system should be employed by the Department of Health and have career paths.
- An appropriate screening process of applicants for counselling posts should be developed so that people who possess the qualities needed to be effective HIV counsellors are more likely to be hired.

# Joint Statement: How to improve HCT



- Home and HIV Self-testing:
- These additional testing options will augment the reach of standard facility-based testing, and are an opportunity for wide scale-up of testing.
- Tests that are being sold must meet quality standards and must be safe and easy for people to use.
- The same essential components of any HIV testing service, including easy access to accurate information especially linkage to care for those who test positive.
- It is vital to have systems and public information that guards against abuse and misuse of self testing in a home environment, particularly of women and children.
- The national AIDS helpline should provide this service.



# Experience of programmes

- The Western Cape "Know your status and Win campaign" - reflections on behaviour change and sustainability - Nick Clelland (Western Cape Government)
- • Incentivised HIV-testing - the experience of the "Men at the Side of the Road" project - Charles Maisel (Indlu Yegazi HIV/AIDS project)
- • Is South Africa Ready for HIV Self-Testing? - preliminary findings from KwaZulu-Natal - Krista Dong (Integration of TB in Education and care for HIV/AIDS (iTEACH))