

# Community perspective on viral load monitoring in resource-limited settings

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# Outline

- Availability of VLT
- Importance of VLT
- Challenges in the provision of VLT in RLS from a Patient Perspective
- Challenges in the provision of VLT in RLS from my service provider
- Recommendations

# Viral load testing status in Africa

- Routine VL testing is unavailable in most African countries
- Apart from South Africa, all African Countries reserve the Viral Load test for confirmation of treatment failure commonly after either immunologic or clinical failure

# Importance of Viral Load Testing

- Guide for clinical decisions on when to switch to other line treatment regimen
- Useful tool to monitor the levels of drug resistance in HIV patients on treatment
- Useful tool for monitoring adherence to treatment
- Useful tool in performing sentinel surveillance
- Diagnosis of HIV infection in children aged <18 months.

## Challenges – Provision of VLT in RLS- Patients

- High costs for the test when requested
- Distance to the health facility where VLT is available
- Lack of awareness on VLT among patients
- Response time in getting results of the VLT due to inadequate manpower
- Inadequate Infrastructure – Labs, No Electricity

# Challenges – Provision of VLT in RLS – Service Provider

## q High costs

- Cost of equipment and reagents and subsequent costs per test
- Cost of infrastructure setup

## q Infrastructure challenges

- Space requirements sufficient to minimize contamination and ensure high quality of test process
- Unreliable power supply, air conditioning
- Equipment breakdown and lack/unreliable local capacity for troubleshooting and maintenance

## q Transport and cold chain logistics

- Most systems require plasma type of specimen which should be separated within six hours of whole blood collection
- Lack/unreliable cold-chain system for plasma transportation and storage to centralized facilities

## Technical complexity

- Current viral load platforms are too complex and require a medium to high level of expertise i.e Trained Human Resource

# Recommendations

- Rather than considering viral load data to be an unaffordable luxury, efforts should be made to ensure that viral load testing becomes affordable, simple, and easy to use in resource-limited settings. This can be done by advocating for increased investment in research and development of easy to use point of care viral load tests.

# Recommendations

- Need to increase the number of VLT machines available in the country – (especially with increased threshold from 350 to 500)
- Need to create demand for VLT by raising awareness on the availability of the service and its importance
- Need to build more labs in rural communities that are solar powered where specimens can be safely stored prior to transportation to the provincial labs
- Need to train more staff who can conduct the VLT
- Improvements in our cold chain system





**THANK YOU**