



Centar za prevenciju  
side i SPI

**Institute for Students' Health, Belgrade**

**IAN**

**Centre for Prevention of AIDS and STIs (Sexually Transmitted  
Infections)**

***WORKING PROTOCOL  
OF THE  
VCT CENTRE***



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## **PREFACE**

The purpose of this protocol is to define and describe procedure of providing counsel and testing on HIV at the VCT (Voluntary Counselling and Testing) Centre. It should be used as a guide for a good practice of counselling and testing and it details rights and duties of the personnel employed in the project in the process of counselling. The protocol does not include their rights and duties in relation to the labour legislation. These lines are regulated by individual contracts of the employees with the base organization (the IAN personnel with IAN, personnel of the Institute for Students' Health with the Institute).

**Goal**

## **DEFINITION**

VCT plan is a joint project of IAN, Institute for Students' Health and CAFOD (funded by CAFOD and CIDA) being implemented at the Centre for Prevention of AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), within the Institute for Students' Health in Belgrade, for the period of March 1st, 2004 to February 28th, 2007. The goal of the project is promotion of voluntary counselling and testing on HIV, as a practice UNAIDS and WHO recommend for the prevention of HIV infection and in support to the people living with HIV and AIDS.

**Activity**

Fundamental activities of the Centre are related to providing HIV counsel and testing, the networking with other organizations because of more comprehensive response in the field of prevention and protection of people living with HIV and AIDS, as well as organizing presentations of the Centre and promoting counselling in Belgrade. In addition, Centre activities include education and training of the employees.

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<sup>1</sup> Goal of the VCT Centre is promotion of counselling, before and after the HIV testing, as a practice the UNAIDS and WHO recommend for the prevention of HIV and providing care and support to people living with HIV and AIDS. Also, Centre intends to brief the public about HIV/ AIDS problems, as well as to reduce discrimination of the infected and diseased.



## **VOLUNTARY COUNSELLING AND TESTING ON HIV (VCT)**

Voluntary counselling is a dialogue between the counsellor and the client with the purpose of:

1. Encouraging transformation of risky behaviour of the client to the HIV risk free behaviour
2. Preventing transmission of the HIV infection
3. Providing psychological support to the ones already being infected.

### **Definition**

It helps individuals find what their HIV status is and serves as a guide for HIV prevention and early admission treatment, care and support.

Before and after HIV testing counselling model, used at the Centre, comprises:

### **1. COUNSELLING BEFORE TAKING THE TEST ON HIV**

("pre-test counselling" or "pre-counselling") – a conversation between a counsellor and the client. Counsellor needs to:

- 1.1 Ensure there is enough time for the interview – for it can often be very detailed and time consuming
- 1.2 Ensure client data remain confidential
- 1.3 Talk to the client about reasons for taking the test and about results expected
- 1.4 Verify client's understanding of the HIV and how is infection transmitted
- 1.5 Offer accurate information about HIV, which can help the client make the right decision about taking the test
- 1.6 Explain what the HIV test means
- 1.7 Authorize the testing procedure

### **Counseling Before Taking the Test on HIV**

Counsellor needs to avoid the following:

- 1.8 Bombard the client with information
- 1.9 Interpret
- 1.10 Diminish the importance of any particular subject the client wishes to discuss
- 1.11 Anticipate possible result of the test
- 1.12 Make decision for the client
- 1.13 Take responsibility for client's conduct



1.14 Evaluate the client, his actions and moralize

## **2. COUNSELLING AFTER TAKING THE TEST ON HIV**

("post-test counselling" or "post-counselling") – a conversation between a counsellor and the client where counsellor reports the test result. Counsellor needs to:

- 2.1 Ensure there is enough time for discussing results of the test, regardless of what the actual result is
- 2.2 Convey the result plainly and simply without hesitation and latency

If the result is negative counsellor needs to:

- 2.3 Remind the client of the window period
- 2.4 Ensure a possible conversation with the client on how the risk of HIV infection can be prevented

If the result is positive, counsellor needs to:

- 2.5 Ensure a time and place are provided for the client, necessary for the acceptance of the result and the client's reaction
- 2.6 Remind the client that being HIV positive is not the same as having AIDS
- 2.7 Explain accurately to the client that test is preliminary and it must be confirmed (or rejected) and explain what are the next steps the client needs to take up: affirmative test at the Clinic for Infective Diseases and possible diagnostic practices (decision about the time when the treatment at the Clinic should begin depend on)
- 2.8 Remind the client he is not alone in facing with that
- 2.9 Make sure if there is somebody where the client wishes to go to once he hears the result out and where he plans to go to once he leaves the centre
- 2.10 Assert the client, that the fact he is found HIV positive will not change counsellors' attitude towards him
- 2.11 Demonstrate clearly to the client he is always welcome
- 2.12 Clearly offer to the client the possibility to meet again

Counsellor needs to avoid to:

- 2.13 Anticipate what would happen with the client when it comes to the infection
- 2.14 Fail to react to any anxiety whatsoever, the client may express or to indicate the client's reaction may be unfounded
- 2.15 Tell the client everything would be fine

**Counseling  
After Taking  
the Test on  
HIV**



- 2.16 To tell the client how he feels
- 2.17 Plan or decide for the client
- 2.18 Give the result at the time when clients' support system is down
- 2.19 Take responsibility for client's actions
- 2.20 Value the client, his conduct and moralize

### 3. HIV TESTING

HIV testing is undertaken at the Institute for Students Health Laboratory, Prote Mateje 29 Street, with the client's referral by the counsellor. *Elisa test COMBO IV generation (Axym HIV Combo Ag/At)* is used in the laboratory. It is an antibody-antigen test. HIV negative after this test (non-reactive) means no antibodies to HIV neither antigen have been found in blood. HIV positive (reactive) test result indicates a very high probability that antibodies to HIV or p24 HIV antigen have been found in blood.

Because of the existing probability - that thus highly sensitive tests are not always one hundred percent specific (a possibility of the discovery of antibodies that can falsely be detected as Anti HIV antibodies - which leads to false positive results) - it is necessary to speak to the client about preliminary positive result, that needs to be confirmed or rejected: at least one more Elisa test from other manufacturer, needs to be taken and subsequently - a Western Blot test.

The tests serve only for quality determination and do not differentiate between HIV 1/ HIV 2 antibodies and the antigen.

Admission of clients is being done at the reception section of the laboratory of the Institute for Students Health, from 9:00h to as 17:30h, on every working day.

Blood for testing is taken from antequbital vein at the bend of the elbow (by vaccutiners – 10 ml).

Separation of the serum that is being used for sample is done by the centrifuge, in order to get the homogenized sample. Then the work list is being assembled, where each sample receives an identification number, under which the blood specimen is followed throughout test. Non-reactive tests, following completion are being printed out.

Reactive samples (with S/CO higher than 1,00) and samples in the so called grey zone (with S/CO – between 0,90 and 1.00) are centrifuged and re-tested in duplicate. In case both results are being found lower than the guideline value (with S/CO lower than 0,90) result is issued as being non-reactive. In case re-testing gives both values being equal to - or higher from - the guideline value (with S/CO higher than 0,90) - test result needs

#### HIV Testing

#### Testing Procedure Following the Arrival to the Laboratory



*Voluntary Pre and Post Test Counseling to the HIV Testing in Serbia*

to be verified by a referential method - the Western Blot test at the referential Institute

With every series of tests a positive and negative control is being applied. If the controls are not found to be within the specified range, the results are declared unreliable and the tests need to be repeated.

All of the results are entered to the workbook. The serum is kept for another 24 hours at plus 4 degrees Celsius temperature.

All blood samples and the material used (expendables) is then submerged to disinfectant (1% solution of natrium-hipo-chlorite).



## **BASIC VCT PRINCIPLES**

1. **KNOWING ONE'S HIV STATUS IS ON VOLUNTARY BASIS** – a person alone makes a decision on whether he/she wants to take the test, i.e. learn about the results. **Voluntariness**
2. **CLIENT'S DATA CONFIDENTIALITY** – all of the data that the client leaves to the counsellor are confidential and are the matter of their relation. **Confidentiality**
3. **ANONYMITY** – each client has the right to be anonymous and is not obliged to present any identification document during counselling and testing. **Anonymity**





## **HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE CLIENTS**

Every person has a right to measured, exact and concise information about HIV/AIDS. At the VCT Centre, this right is accomplished through professional counselling before the HIV testing and through providing information over the AIDS info phone.

Every person has the right to know one's own HIV status - which a person can, but need not necessarily disclose to others.

A person can quit from testing to the HIV at any moment during the process of voluntary counselling and HIV testing.

**Every Person  
Has the Right  
to Know One's  
Own HIV  
Status**

1. A client quits from the testing after the counselling and before the testing, information is being recorded in the list of clients / the database and the client is not referred to the testing.
2. The client quits after giving blood:
  - 2.1 Personally at the analyst's – the analyst informs the counsellor - who records this in the clients list / the database and the blood sample is not tested.
  - 2.2 Personally at the counsellor's – counsellor informs the laboratory, terminates the process of testing the sample and records this in the list of clients / the database.
  - 2.3 By phone – counsellor records this in the list of clients / the database but the process of testing the sample is not being suspended.
3. If a client gives up from the right to find out the status following arrival of the results, the information is recorded in the list of clients/ the database, where the result is attached to, and both are being filed as confidential documents of the VCT Centre.

Procedure for data retention is explained to the client and he is given a code "the client number" and the counsellor's name. The client can approach the VCT Centre, at any later time if he wishes to find out about his result. If the client forgets the ID number or the counsellor's name, linking the client to the time of the pre-test meeting is attempted. If neither in that case the counsellor can be identified, the entire procedure, pre-counselling, the testing, post-counselling is then repeated.



## *Voluntary Pre and Post Test Counseling to the HIV Testing in Serbia*

The right to decide on whether to entrust somebody with one's own HIV status and who to entrust is the right, but also a responsibility of every client. This right and responsibility is presented through elements 1.12 in pre-counselling and 3.14 and 3.16 in post-counselling.

A client who wishes to file a complaint over the quality of services received at the centre, should be provided with a written explanation of the complaint procedure (Annex 1). The aim of introducing a possibility of client's complaint is to provide all of the clients with an option to complain over the services provided if they consider they should. Complaints can help improve the counselling practice and the HIV testing and attune better such practice to the clients.

### **Client Complaints**



## **CRITERION FOR THE ADMISSION TO THE CENTRE**

### **1. Equal Opportunities for All**

VCT Centre is open to all citizens of Serbia and Montenegro, regardless of the race, national and religious determination, sex or sexual orientation.

**Equal  
Opportunities  
for All**

All Serbia and Montenegro citizens can use AIDS info phone to receive general information on HIV/AIDS and inform themselves about the VCT Centre work.

All Serbia and Montenegro citizens, as well as foreign nationals, can become counselling and HIV testing clients at the VCT Centre. Counselling can be provided in English, Russian and Italian language with an appointment.

### **2. Criterion for Free Testing**

All citizens who meet the criterion can become FREE testing clients.

**Free Testing**

Criterion for FREE testing is the presence of risky behaviour of more than 8 weeks ago. It is possible to take the free testing, even if 8 weeks from the last risky behaviour incident have not passed yet – in the following occasions:

- Travelling abroad
- Rape (sexual attack)
- Pregnancy planned or actual
- HIV positive sexual partner
- Accident during medical interventions
- (prick, injury by surgical instruments...)

### **3. Risky Behaviour**

Risky behaviour includes:

1. Unprotected sexual intercourse (without condom): anal, vaginal and oral

**Risky  
Behaviour**



2. Using intravenous drugs over the needle (sharing a kit)
3. Unprotected sexual intercourse with intravenous drug addicts
4. Sexual intercourse under the influence of alcohol or drugs
5. Tattoo, piercing
6. Risky behaviour of a sexual partner

**The Testing Can be Charged for if:**

1. Counsellor assesses there has not been any risky behaviour, but the person insists on taking the test, nevertheless.
2. 8 weeks from the last known risk have not passed yet.
3. It is found, that the same person have been issued a referral by the same - or other counsellor, and tested more than twice.

**Testing That  
is Not Free**



## **REFERRALS**

After the first pre-counselling, the client can be referred to a referential institute from the list of partner organizations or referential institutes. Clients are being referred to the institutes, with which service agreements exist, based on public information.

Partner organizations are organizations with which service agreements about cooperation have been reached and clients are being referred to them in accordance with previously agreed protocol.

The list of partner organizations will be amended and changed, based on the experiences of the counsellors. The agreements with the partner organizations (in written form) are saved as appendices to this protocol.

**What Do We Offer to a Client, Post Counseling and Testing?**



## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### 1. Meetings

Meetings of the employees are held as required, and they can be called by the Centre for prevention of AIDS Supervisor, Ms Mila Paunić Phd, following a request of any of the employees of the Centre. Minutes of the meetings are filed in the ADMINISTRATION register.

**Meetings**

### 2. Supervisions

- "Peer supervisions" are held every Friday at 12h. Supervisions can be practiced through the case studies or by "role play" technique. One of the counsellors is responsible for organizing and documenting supervisions. Case studies and supervision reports are filed to the SUPERVISION register as confidential documents.
- External supervision – external supervision will be conducted by Mr. Jim Simmons from CAFOD, who will set the schedule for supervisions, their content, identify requirements and e-mail them, 7 days prior to the supervision, at the latest. He will also write the report. Presence at the supervision is mandatory for all staff employed in the project.

**Supervisions**

### 3. Usage of the Equipment

Equipment of the VCT Centre is the property of the Institute for Students' Health and can be used by all of the employees of the Centre for Prevention of AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections, including the volunteers. The service level agreement between IAN and the Institute for Students' Health regulates using of the equipment and property rights for the equipment bought from the project budget.

**Usage of the  
Equipment**

### 4. Working Hours and Absence from Work

The VCT Centre – every working day from 8:30h to 17:00h  
AIDS INFO Phone – every working day from 8:30h to 19:00h  
SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS – Monday, Wednesday  
and Friday from 8:30h to 13:00h.

**Working  
Hours**

Employees of the Institute for Students' Health log their arrival to work and leaving the work in the database "Polyclinic" and the IAN employees - in the workbook "IAN". The following is logged in the workbook:

- a. First and Last Name
- b. Time of the arrival to work and time of leaving the work
- c. Absence from work longer than 15 minutes



## **SAFETY AT WORK**

General provisions of Safety at Work already in effect at the Institute for Students' Health will be implemented. Separate safety at work measures related to the specifics of work at the Centre will be developed additionally:

### **Safety at Work**

- Counsellor should not receive clients when he is alone at the Centre
- If advance information about potential risks exist, security at the Centre should be informed
- Personal records of the counsellor should not be left unattended at the place where client can reach them
- Premises should be alight well and the front doors shut.

All incidents should be reported and registered in accordance with the safety protection of the Institute for Students' health staff regulations.



## **MEDIA ADVERTISEMENT**

VCT Centre advertises itself in order to implement its goals <sup>1</sup>. Thus, the VCT Centre informs potential clients about services and ways to get to them, and supports the efforts directed at securing donations.

The only persons who can authorize public presentation of the VCT Centre are Dragan Ilić and Mila Paunić for the Institute for Students' Health and Violeta Anđelković for the IAN. Decisions are being reached by the consensus. They can delegate tasks related to the public presentation and appearances to other staff.

In every public appearance, the donors should be mentioned in a manner defined by separate agreements with the donors.

### **The Media**





## **DOCUMENTATION**

Project reports (narrative and financial), which are exclusive responsibility of the executive partner, in this case the IAN, will be drafted according to the policy and procedures of IAN.

VCT Centre will maintain accurately the following documentation:

1. List of Clients – the Database
2. List of Supervisions
3. Minutes of the Meetings

### **Public Documents**

Statistics – this document will be a report from the database with most basic statistics and practical information (number of people attending counselling, the testing, most effective method of advertisement, etc).

This document is available to all of the employees and volunteers at the VCT Centre of the Student's Polyclinic, as well as to the intermediate and higher executive staff of all three implementing partners (CAFOD, IAN and SP) and the donors (CAFOD and CIDA). Segments of the data or the entire statistics can be used in public appearances of the donors and partners.

**Public  
Documents**

### **Blank Documents are Semi-Privileged**

Blank documents are the forms where basic details of interventions are being recorded. VCT Centre will have the following mandatory blank documents:

1. List of Clients – form where basic details obtained during the pre counselling are recorded
2. Referral to the testing
3. Referrals for other Organizations and Institutes.

**Semi -  
Privileged  
Documents**

Semi-restricted documents are available to all employees and volunteers, the Institute for Students' Health VCT Centre Supervisor, as well as to the intermediate and higher executive staff of all three partners (CAFOD, IAN and the Institute for Students' Health) and the donors (CAFOD and CIDA). *Segments of lists or the entire package of lists can not be used in public appearances of donors and partners - and can not be published.*



## **Privileged Documents**

All semi-restricted documents once they are filled with content become restricted. The printouts of appropriate documents from the database are also restricted.

Privileged documents, their entry and the reports from the database are treated as clinical records. Privileged documents of every counsellor and volunteer are filed in non-transparent folders - each employee files restricted documents and clinical records. Counsellor's or the volunteer's unique code numbers are equivalent of the keys to the database.

Only the Supervisor has access to all restricted documents of the persons supervised.

**Privileged Documents**

## **Database**

The database is a base wherein all details from the VCT lists are being recorded. It is the property of IAN, the Institute for Students' Health and CAFOD.

**Database**



## **ANNEX 1**

If the client feels he should complain over any services provided at the Centre whatsoever, he should follow the procedure as detailed below:

1. The complaint over the quality of services at the Centre can be reported to any counsellor at the Centre – either verbally or in writing.
2. The complaint will be reviewed by the Centre coordinators - and they will respond to the complaint within two weeks period.
3. If the client is not satisfied with the response, he can address his written complaint, to the Director of the Students' polyclinic or the Chairman of the Executive Board of IAN.
4. They will respond in written within the three weeks.