

Increasing capacity to provide high quality clinical management of COVID-19 cases in Honduras

The United States Government (USG), through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), provided the Government of Honduras with a donation of 210 ventilators for intensive care units to assist its fight against COVID-19. The donation delivered on the U.S. administration's pledge to provide critically needed supplies and support Honduras's efforts to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The USG-donated ventilators significantly increased the supply in public sector facilities, which previously had about 336 total.

Between June 2020 and July 2021, the Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project provided technical assistance (TA) and capacity-strengthening support for critical case management to health care providers and facilities. EpiC collaborated closely with the

Secretaría de Salud (SESAL, or Ministry of Health) and other key stakeholders to strengthen the capacity of the government to receive, install, and use the ventilators. EpiC also assessed TA needs for the clinical management of COVID-19 and, as a result, incorporated clinical TA topics into the training on ventilators (including respiratory therapy, intubation, infection prevention and control [IPC], and monitoring of ventilators). In total, 823 clinicians (527 female, 296 male) were trained in these topics. Of those trained, 486 were general practice physicians, 130 were nursing professionals, and 83 were specialist physicians, while 124 reported other professions or left the question blank.

EPIC'S KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Support for the delivery and installation of 210 mechanical ventilators at 21 hospitals
- 21 facility-level assessments conducted to confirm hospital capacity and identify technical assistance needs
- 823 clinicians trained in COVID-19 clinical case management

Activities and Accomplishments

COORDINATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

EpiC supported SESAL to receive, inventory, and distribute mechanical ventilators. To ensure that ventilators could be connected to hospital oxygen systems and used for patient care, EpiC worked closely with hospital biomedical engineers, the local ventilator maintenance company, the oxygen supply company, and SESAL's head of hospitals to identify equipment needs, such as adapters, and support installation as needed.

FACILITY-LEVEL ASSESSMENTS

Working with the newly established Ventilator Task Force, SESAL identified 21 public hospitals in 16 of the country's 18 geographic departments to receive the donated ventilators. These facilities—including three national referral hospitals—were chosen for their capacity to rapidly implement use of the ventilators for COVID-19 care and for their broad geographic distribution. EpiC collaborated with a local research organization to assess the facilities' preparedness to receive and effectively use the ventilators to care for patients with severe COVID-19. The assessment found that less than half the hospitals had clinical staff trained in mechanical ventilation, and two-thirds reported their facility had never performed mechanical ventilation. Other findings included a lack of oxygen equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE), and infection prevention and control equipment, protocols, and practices. The information collected through these rapid assessments was used to target EpiC's clinical TA plan, which focused on strengthening mechanical ventilation skills and IPC practices. SESAL will use the findings for longer term planning of capacity strengthening and resource allocation. Other topics including PPE and equipment were outside of EpiC's scope of work and will be a focus of SESAL.

TRAINING ON COVID-19 CLINICAL MANAGEMENT

In collaboration with the USAID-funded Health Policy Plus (HP+) project and the Government of Honduras, EpiC developed a training curriculum on the use of ventilators, critical care for patients with COVID-19, and improving infection prevention and control. EpiC trained 819 clinicians at 25 facilities using this curriculum, and it has been adopted by the Government of Honduras as an official training. HP+ and EpiC also developed a 10-part tutorial video in Spanish to train frontline health workers on high-impact COVID-19 interventions. The video enables training for critical care staff who have limited flexibility to attend in-person sessions, and it can be used as a refresher tool for health care workers who have already been trained. EpiC provided additional trainings for 65 internal medicine and general practitioner physicians on therapeutics for COVID-19, in line with emerging evidence and World Health Organization (WHO) guidance. Additionally, the EpiC team supported the standardization of SESAL's drug request form to expedite use of these therapeutics for patients with severe COVID-19.



Photo credit: Alicia Cerrato/Palladium

Health workers in Honduras receive training on using USG-donated ventilators to care for COVID-19 patients.

CRITICAL CARE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

To increase sustainable critical care capacity in Honduras, EpiC provided TA to the Honduran Association of Intensive Care for its new mentorship program for intensive care physicians. This included support for development of the mentorship curriculum and plan to mentor health care workers at 12 hospitals on critical care topics. Ten mentors were selected and received TA from EpiC on how to implement an effective clinical mentorship program. Under EpiC, 42 health care workers were mentored. This mentorship program, which will continue beyond EpiC through a grant from the HP+ project, will support clinicians to improve the quality of care for patients with COVID-19.

Conclusions

COVID-19 clinical case management TA in Honduras has increased the country's capacity to provide high quality clinical management of COVID-19 cases. "The capacity development processes and the ventilation equipment have strengthened care provision [in Honduras]," said Alba Flores, Minister of Health in Honduras. "The pandemic has challenged our medical and nursing professionals to improve their knowledge and practices."

Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC), a five-year global project funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is dedicated to achieving and maintaining HIV epidemic control. EpiC is led by FHI 360 with core partners Right to Care (RTC), Palladium, Population Services International (PSI), and Gobe Group. EpiC and its consortium members are implementing COVID-19 activities in more than 20 countries on three continents. In 13 of those countries, EpiC is providing technical assistance (TA) to governments and specific health facilities that received U.S. Government (USG)-donated ventilators and to health providers on COVID-19 clinical case management.

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