



How a COVID-19 Project Boosted Long COVID and NCD Care in Kiambu County

Background

Long COVID-19 patients with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) benefit from integrated services that address their comprehensive health needs. Many Long COVID patients experience a range of symptoms that affect various organ systems and may overlap with pre-existing NCDs such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and respiratory disorders. Considering both the immediate effects of the virus and the chronic conditions, healthcare providers can offer coordinated care for acute and chronic health concerns, improving healthcare efficiency. Thus, integration model for Long COVID and NCD represents a significant step towards a more comprehensive and patient-centered healthcare response post-pandemic. NCDs are a major global health challenge, killing 41 million people each year, equivalent to 74% of deaths globally.¹

The deaths are more prevalent in low- and middle-income countries, including Kenya, where NCDs account for more than 50% of in-patient hospital admissions and 39% of all deaths annually.² Kiambu County, in particular, suffers a disproportionately high burden of NCDs compared to the rest of Kenya. Therefore, integrating Long COVID-19 and NCD services is a vital strategy to improve the health outcomes and quality of life of the affected population.

Long COVID/NCD Integration Model

The Catalyzing COVID-19 Action (CCA) project, a FIND and Unitaid-funded initiative, has improved the diagnosis and care of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Kiambu County, Kenya. The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF) received the award for the CCA project in the fiscal year 2021 to strengthen the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The CCA team in Kenya aimed to ease the NCD burden in patients who had a history of COVID-19, as most of them had underlying NCDs. Kiambu County had been supporting the NCD work without an implementing partner, but the CCA project changed that. The project trained community and facility-based healthcare workers to screen for Long COVID-19 and NCDs. It also provided NCD equipment such as blood sugar strips, blood pressure machines, and patient monitors to improve the diagnosis of NCDs in the county. Moreover, it enhanced the sensitization and awareness of Long COVID through community dialogue days and health talks at the NCD sites. Joan Munene, the Kiambu County NCD Coordinator, commended EGPAF's work for ensuring the uninterrupted provision of NCD services at the NCD sites. The CCA project has made a significant impact on the health outcomes and quality of life of the patients with NCDs and Long COVID in Kiambu County.

Joan Munene said, "We have not had a partner supporting the NCD work as a county, but the interventions put in place by the CCA project have enabled us to screen and provide more holistic care to patients. The equipment and support we have received so far have improved the diagnosis on the county's side and reduced the number of severe cases due to late diagnosis."

1 <https://bit.ly/3sVcK2v>

2 <https://bit.ly/3GkB80o>



Photo Image: CCA Country Implementation Manager, Dr. Virginia Gitau, alongside Kiambu County NCD Coordinator, Joan Munene, and Ruiru Sub-County MOH, Dr. Evan Mwangi, showcasing with the NCD training manual developed by EGPAF in collaboration with MOH. Photo Credit: Koffi Goga 2023

Achievements

EGPAF has achieved remarkable results by integrating Long COVID and NCD services in Kiambu County, Kenya. EGPAF provided additional human resources by allocating study nurses to screen for Long COVID and NCDs on specific clinic days. They also procured NCD equipment to improve the management of NCD services at 11 facilities where Long COVID services are also available. The EGPAF team developed and shared an NCD training manual that includes a NCD screening tool and Long COVID services with the County and National Ministry of Health Officials. They used the manual to conduct Training of Trainers for Long COVID and NCD screening and management. Moreover, they provided an NCD refresher training to 22 health care professionals in Kiambu County to enhance their diagnosis and care of patients with NCDs. Furthermore, EGPAF incorporated Long COVID screening tool, NCD screening tool, and NCD management into the Kenya electronic medical record (EMR) to help the county digitize records for easy access and retrieval. This innovative model of Long COVID and NCD integration has improved patient outcomes and health care efficiency in Kiambu County.

Conclusion

Integrating Long COVID services into NCD services in Kiambu County, Kenya, has transformed healthcare delivery. This strategy improves patient outcomes and healthcare efficiency by addressing both the immediate effects of the virus and the chronic conditions of the patients. The CCA project has developed effective screening methods and provided essential medical equipment, advancing disease management. EGPAF's efforts have also reduced severe cases due to late diagnosis and offered more holistic care for patients. By establishing Long COVID services within the NCD services, the project demonstrates its commitment to organized and efficient care, sets a precedent for comprehensive and patient-centered healthcare response, and highlights the need for continuous innovation and collaboration in the face of global health challenges.