

• **What is ICTC? Ans:** Ans. ICTC stands for Integrated Counselling and Testing Centre.

• **What is the role of ICTC in the prevention of HIV/AIDS? Ans:** As the HIV problem intensifies, the issues of care and support for affected individuals, and prevention of HIV transmission to those who are not affected, become even more critical. Integrated Counselling and Testing (ICT) is now seen as a key entry point for a range of interventions in HIV prevention and care. It provides people with an opportunity to learn and accept their HIV sero status in a confidential and enabling environment and to cope with the stress arising out of HIV infection. ICT should become an integral part of HIV prevention programmes, as it is a relatively cost-effective intervention in preventing HIV transmission.

The potential benefits of ICT are:

- Earlier access to care and treatment
- Providing factual information about HIV /AIDS and clearing misconceptions
- Reduction of fear and stigma through counselling
- Creating enabling environment for PLHA
- Emotional support
- Better ability to cope with HIV related anxiety
- Improved health status through good nutritional advice
- Motivation to initiate or maintain safer sexual practices and behaviour change
- Prevention of HIV related illness
- Motivation for drug related behaviour
- Safer blood donation
- Motivating HIV infected person to involve spouse/partner for future spread and care.

• **What is the setup at ICTC? Ans:** ICTC is not a place just for testing a sample for HIV, but much more than that. One of the basic elements involved is a confidential discussion between the client and the trained counsellor and the focus is on emotional and social issues related to possible or actual HIV infection. The aim of the ICTC is to reduce psycho-social stress and provide the client with information & support necessary to make decisions, therefore it needs a private and peaceful setting.

Separate enclosures for male & female clients have been set up to provide confidential environment for encouraging disclosure and providing IPC.

For the effective functioning of the ICTCs, two trained counsellors and one laboratory technician have been provided in each ICTC.

In order to ensure that the result of the HIV test is given on same day to the individual after post-test counselling, Rapid HIV Test Kits have been supplied to these centres or the client is asked to meet the same counsellor for post test counselling on appointed date.

Waiting space, trained Microbiologist/Pathologist, training to staff functionaries of ICTC, two trained counsellors and one laboratory technician have been provided in each ICTC.

In order to ensure that ICTCs provide quality counselling services, stress has been laid on pre-placement in-service training of counsellors & technicians by master trainers & resource persons. Orientation training is also conducted for these functionaries.

• **What has been done to make ICTCs user–friendly?** **Ans:** In order to make the services more user–friendly following efforts are being made:

- ICTCs are located in easily accessible areas mostly in OPDs.
- Informed consent in local language is taken before HIV testing. Clients are informed about the nature and consequences of HIV test before their consent is taken. It is emphasised that testing should not be forced but left at the will of the client.
- Here it is emphasised that counsellors should not be rotated from centre to centre and from one day to another since the rapport between the counsellor and client is very essential.

- Adequate supply of condoms is made available in these counselling centres. Individuals attending the ICTC are also made aware about the outlets from which they can get condoms under various schemes.
- Counselling is integrated into other services, including STI, antenatal and RCH clinics.
- Referral system has been developed in consultation with NGOs, community based organisations, hospitals and PLWA networks.
- Counsellors are provided adequate training and ongoing support and supervision to ensure that they give good quality counselling and avoid burnout.
- Linkages with NGOs for social support, follow–up counselling and care for those tested sero positive are emphasised.
- Innovative ways of scaling up ICT services and making them more accessible and available is the endeavour.

There is an emphasis to make it more client–friendly and service based by augmenting the following services:

- Anti retroviral drugs in PPTCT
- Anti–tubercular treatment in HIV–TB co–infection
- Free treatment of STI & opportunistic infections
- Follow up services & networking among patients living with AIDS.