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'We are left in cold': nurses' perceptions and responses to antiretroviral treatment roll-out in the Free State, South Africa

CITATION

De Wet K & du Plooy S. 2012. 'We are left in cold': nurses' perceptions and responses to antiretroviral treatment roll-out in the Free State, South Africa. *Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS Research Alliance (SAHARA-J)*, 9(1): 30-40. DOI: 10.1080/17290376.2012.665256

ABSTRACT

The unprecedented roll-out of antiretroviral therapy (ART) in South Africa is a complex process where no previous endeavour exists that can measure, predict, or direct an intervention of this scale. In the Free State province, unique characteristics and problems distinguish its ART programme, although countrywide problems also occur within the province. The Free State province faces high vacancy rates among its health-care workers, the programme has lower patient enrollment rates because of an obsession with quality to the detriment of quantity, and various incidents of ART shortages have also shook the province. The ART roll-out intervention thus far has been largely nurse-driven (however not nurse initiated), and they form what many refer to as the 'backbone' of the programme. In order to respond to the challenges faced by these front-line ART providers, continuous transformations inevitably take place to respond to new needs associated with the roll-out programme, but also to strengthen the primary health-care system in general. The objective of this article is to present a typology of contradictory contextual factors in the antiretroviral programme as identified through group interviews that were conducted with PNs at public health-care clinics in the five districts of the Free State province during 2005 and 2006. We intend to show that transformations often have contradictory and problematic outcomes as expressed and perceived by the nurses themselves. This unprecedented endeavour of ART roll-out inevitably has to treasure and support its most valued implementers, i.e. the front-line providers who are not only professionals in the health-care setting, but also social agents in a wider contextual framework.