



## Centre for health Systems Research & Development

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### **Towards a health-enabling working environment - developing and testing interventions to decrease HIV and TB stigma among healthcare workers in the Free State, South Africa: study protocol for a randomised controlled trial**

#### **CITATION**

Rau A, Wouters E, Engelbrecht M, Masquillier C, Uebel K, Kigozi G, Sommerland N & Janse van Rensburg A. 2018. Towards a health-enabling working environment – developing and testing interventions to decrease HIV and TB stigma among healthcare workers in the Free State, South Africa: study protocol for a randomised controlled trial. *Trials*, 19:351. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-018-2713-5>

#### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Occupational exposure to tuberculosis (TB) constitutes a major health risk for healthcare workers (HCWs). The HIV epidemic equally affects the workforce because of the mutually reinforcing epidemiology of HIV and TB. Stigmas associated with HIV and TB have become so intricately entangled that they stop some HCWs from seeking care in a context where serious shortages in human resources for health besiege public health facilities. It is thus imperative to research, as well as attempt to tackle, HIV and TB stigma among HCWs. But little has been done internationally—and nationally, only our own exploratory studies. Our project aims to address this by (1) scientifically assessing the extent and sources of HIV and TB-related stigma among HCWs and (2) developing and testing evidence-based, stigma-reduction interventions in public hospitals in the Free State Province of South Africa.

**Methods/design:** The research follows a stratified cluster randomised controlled trial (RCT) design. Pre intervention, a self-administered questionnaire with the pilot study's validated stigma scales is used to measure stigma and other key variables among randomly selected HCWs in eight hospitals—stratified by size and district and then randomly allocated to four intervention and four control sites. Interventions comprise HIV- and TB-stigma reduction activities—mainly Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) interventions—at three social-ecology levels (individual, community, and socio-structural). An outside assessor will appraise the trial mid-way through implementation. Post intervention, all baseline respondents will be followed up to complete the baseline questionnaire with additional items on interventions. Qualitative data will be collected to better understand HIV and TB stigma and explore if, and how, interventions impact stigma levels in the workplace.

**Discussion:** The study regards as HCWs all staff, working in all different types of jobs, at all levels in the hospitals. Thus, the research addresses HIV and TB stigma across the whole workforce and the entire workplace. In doing so it will (1) generate essential information on stigma among HCWs and (2) implement stigma-reduction interventions that are innovative yet replicable, and potentially beneficial in addressing a pernicious human-rights-based issue.

**Trial registration:** South African National Clinical Trials Register, registration ID: DOH-27-1115-5204. Prospectively registered on 26 August 2015.

**Keywords:** HIV& TB Stigma; Healthcare workers; Occupational health; Workforce; Workplace; South Africa