Smart VA training

About verbal autopsy

Verbal autopsy (VA) is the most practical option for diagnosing cause of death (COD) when deaths occur outside hospitals or in health care facilities. VA is applied where it is not possible to assign COD, either due to limited diagnostic capabilities or because the patient arrived shortly before or after death.

VA is a method for collecting information from the family about an individual's signs and symptoms prior to death, and interpreting these to diagnose the likely or most probable COD.

The process consists of three basic steps:

- 1) setting up a VA interview by a trained VA staff member at the household (or other appropriate place)
- 2) conducting an interview and collecting information on signs and symptoms of illnesses/events that the deceased suffered before death
- 3) interpreting the interview data to diagnose the most likely COD.

About this course

The course covers the importance of VA for assigning COD for community deaths, the roles and responsibilities of VA interviewers and supervisors, ethics and sensitivity in conducting a VA interview, detailed review of the questions included in the four modules of the SmartVA questionnaire, and how to collect information using a tablet.

This five-day course will equip VA Interviewers and their supervisors with all the knowledge and skills required to conduct quality VA data collection using the SmartVA questionnaire on a tablet.

Expected results

Interviewers

SmartVA interviewers understand and can apply the ethics and methods of conducting a VA interview using a tablet, and have actively participated in practical exercises to demonstrate their skills and capacity. They also understand the roles and responsibilities of interviewers and supervisors as they relate to their country context and can apply these in their verbal autopsy data collection.

Supervisors

SmartVA supervisors understand and can apply the ethics and methods of conducting a VA interview using a tablet, and other supervisory responsibilities for the implementation of routine VA.

Facilitators

SmartVA facilitators continue to improve their VA interviewer training content and delivery based on their experience of training and feedback from the participants of VA Interviewer training. Facilitators are expected to review and update materials to make them contextually relevant as well as adapt methods to assist in the delivery of the course content.

Teaching and learning methods

Course delivery is based on adult learning principles. A range of teaching methods, such as presentations, discussions, case studies, exercises and group work, will be used to address the varying learning styles of course participants.

Course objectives

Interviewers

After the training course, Smart VA interviewers should be able to:

- Explain the concept and purpose of VA within a CRVS system

- Describe the purpose of SmartVA for generating COD data for the country

- Explain how to conduct the VA activities according to general ethical standards

- Describe the roles and responsibilities of the VA interviewer for routine collection of COD information on community deaths

- Explain how the deaths that require a SmartVA interview will be identified from reporting systems, as appropriate for the country

- Explain all the questions in the four modules of the SmartVA questionnaire

- Demonstrate use of the tablet, administer VA, edit information and save the completed forms using the tablet

- Conduct a VA in the community using a tablet.

Supervisors

After the training course, the SmartVA supervisors should be able to:

- Explain the concept and purpose of VA within a CRVS system

- Describe the purpose of SmartVA for generating COD data for the country

Course materials

- SmartVA: facilitator's guide

- Supplementary materials for facilitators:

  - an interviewer's self-assessment checklist

  - supervisor's checklist

  - example information sheet/consent form

  - test for ethical training

  - ethics exercise worksheet

  - situation scenarios

  - medical dictionary of terms

  - VA Interview - observer's checklist

  - feedback form

- SmartVA: Interviewer's manual

- Tablet exercises

- Role-play case studies

- PowerPoint presentations

Participant pre-requisites

Interviewers

- At least equivalent of high school (12 years) education

- Familiarity with data collection methods, especially interviewing

- Familiarity with the existing catchment/area

Supervisors

- At least equivalent of high school (12 years) education

- Familiarity with data collection methods, especially interviewing

- Familiarity with the existing catchment/area

- Familiarity with organising and reporting field level data to a higher level

- IT skills and data management experience are desirable

Facilitators

- To cover the range of required experience and skills, it is highly recommended that each training course on VA for interviewers or supervisors has two facilitators. While not a necessity, some level of clinical knowledge (such as obtained through medical or anursing training) is of great benefit to conducting the training. In addition, familiarity and confidence with the technology needed to conduct VA (tablet, and electronic questionnaire) is needed amongst the facilitator team.

- Ideally, the facilitators would have participated in courses developed for D4H countries. They should have knowledge of CRVS systems and a good understanding of local mortality systems.

Day	Theme	Topics	Session
Day 1	General overview and introduction to VA	Introductions	Session 1 Orientation, personal instroductions and overview of agenda
		CRVS systems	Session 2 What is a CRVS system?
		Verbal autopsy interview	Session 3 Overview of VA and Smart VA
		Conducting a VA interview	Session 4 Identifying deaths for a VA interview
			Session 5 Roles and responsibilities of the VA interviewer
			Session 6 Supervisory procedures
			Session 7 Ethical training
			Session 8 Sensitivity training
Day 2	VA modules in the SmartVA questionnaire	VA modules	Session 9 Review SmartVA: Interviewer's manual and the general module
			Session 10 Adult and adolescent VA module
			Session 11 Child VA module
Day 3	VA modules and using tablets to collect VA data	Va modules	Session 12 Neonatal VA module
		Tablets	Session 13 Tablets and troubleshooting
			Session 14 Using the tablet for VA interviews
Day 4	Practical application of VA knowledge and skills	Role play	Session 15 Role play - conducting a VA interview
		Field practice	Session 16 Field practice of VA interviews using a tablet (theory and preparation)
Day 5	Practical application of VA knowledge and skills	Field practice	Session 16 Field practice and feedback session
		Closing	Questions, course evaluation and closing

The program partners on this initiative include: The University of Melbourne, Australia; CDC Foundation, USA; Vital Strategies, USA; Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, USA; World Health Organization, Switzerland.

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics partners:

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