



# Klinika Bernardo

## ► Background

Transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus in the Philippines has shifted in recent years, with a rapidly expanding epidemic among males who have sex with males and transgender women. Many of them choose not to access counseling and testing services for the human immunodeficiency virus, do not initiate antiretroviral therapy or fail to adhere to treatment. Social hygiene clinics, which have traditionally been at the core of the government's response to the human immunodeficiency virus, are ill-prepared to handle the new cohort of young, educated and professional males who have sex with males seeking services.

## ► The ROMP Project

FHI 360 and our local partners implemented the Reaching Out to Most-at-risk Populations (ROMP) Project funded by the United States Agency for International Development in Quezon City from 2012 to 2015. The aim of the project was to assist the Philippines Government in reducing rates of infection with the human immunodeficiency virus among males who have sex with males and transgender women. One key project strategy was technical assistance and funding to the Quezon City Health Department for the establishment of Klinika Bernardo, a comprehensive, male-focused diagnostic, treatment and referral facility. After supporting Klinika Bernardo for three years, ROMP presents below a brief on the development, outcomes and practical challenges of establishing and supporting this intervention model.

## ► Working With What You Have and Meeting Clients Where They Are

The Klinika Bernardo Men's Wellness Clinic is co-located within the facilities of the Bernardo Social Hygiene Clinic, sharing office space, patient examination rooms and laboratory facilities. While the Bernardo Social Hygiene Clinic runs on a typical 8:00 am to 5:00 pm schedule, Klinika Bernardo is open from 3:00 -11:00 pm, to accommodate the schedules of males who have sex with males. That's why Klinika Bernardo is often referred to as the Philippines' first "sundown clinic."

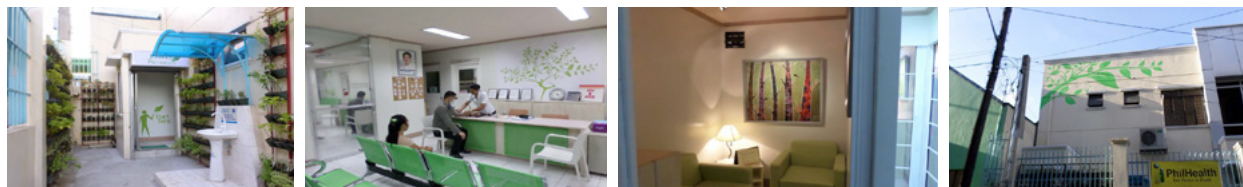
*"Our jobs are very fulfilling and meaningful because we are able to touch so many lives; we listen to so many life stories," explains Head Physician Dr. John Ruiz. "But at the end of the day, we are also tired. We need to be assured of some long-term security in our jobs."*

Meeting these hours required shifting existing work schedules. While staff members find the work rewarding, they also admit that such a shift in working hours can be difficult unless there is some guarantee of job security. Klinika Bernardo staff members were initially hired on temporary contracts; however, these jobs have since been made permanent.

Safety is additionally an issue with a clinic open well past normal operating hours, which is why the Local Government Unit solicited assistance from the barangay to ensure security is available into the evening, which staff say has made a noticeable difference for them and their clients.

## ► Creating an Appropriate and Welcoming Environment

Social hygiene clinics have traditionally served women working in entertainment establishments who are required to undergo a weekly health examination. When the Quezon City Health Department set out to establish services for males who have sex with males, they discovered that most men avoided social hygiene clinics based on the impression that they are primarily “for women.”



Klinika Bernardo has, over the past three years, worked to improve its surroundings to ensure a welcoming and comfortable environment for males who have sex with males. This has included recruiting or reassigning male staff to work in the sundown clinic and undergoing training in male sexual health, interpersonal communication, and sensitization to issues facing males who have sex with males and transgender women. The United States Agency for International Development’s ROMP and CHANGE projects also worked together on a major refurbishment and redesign of the clinic, which included a new color scheme, a more comfortable waiting area and private counseling rooms, and air conditioners.

“It is very attractive – not only the physical side. This is a marketing strategy for us, so we can increase the number of clients who get tested here in our clinic,” says Nurse Milton Castillo, a Klinika Bernardo Case Management Coordinator. “We are very privileged to be part of this clinic – as the reputation of the clinic goes up, our own names go up.”

“The most unique component of this project is the Service Delivery Network. Our Service Delivery Network members are not only contact persons or acquaintances, they are friends now,” explains Nurse Castillo, the Case Management Coordinator. “There is a closeness between us, there is a bond between us, that is time-tested. We are almost two years together. We settle our problems and difference in a nice way, and we have solutions right away. [Klinika Bernardo] is the link between all those agencies.”

## ► Providing a Comprehensive Package

The concept behind Klinika Bernardo is not just to make clinical services for males who have sex with males more welcoming and accessible, but also to make the services as comprehensive as possible. That’s why Klinika Bernardo offers rapid screening for the human immunodeficiency virus with same-day test results, as well as an on-site, rapid test for cluster of differentiation 4 (CD4) a protein found on the surface of immune cells which is commonly used to measure the health of the immune system in people living with the human immunodeficiency virus. The clinic is also registered as a satellite treatment hub for antiretroviral therapy.

Of course, Klinika Bernardo staff members know that their clients experience a wide range of needs, both medical and otherwise, beyond what the clinic can provide. The Service Delivery Network was established in December 2013 to provide a link between health and non-health services.

## ► Getting the Word Out

One final component of the Klinika Bernardo model is outreach and communication to make new clients aware of the services, and to keep contact with those clients over time. To this end, the clinic serves as the base for a team of trained outreach workers and volunteers, and draws on many non-governmental, private sector, and even faith-based partners that help to spread awareness and refer clients.

The clinic also uses mobile and social media channels for strengthening communications between the healthcare providers and their clients, including through the TXTBro SMS service. Clients may also choose to book a clinic appointment online at [www.bernardobuddies.com](http://www.bernardobuddies.com)

### ► What does it Cost to Implement?

These estimates focus on the setting-up and staffing of a “sundown clinic”. The detail on estimated cost of the Peer Education, Case Management Team, Peer Support Groups, and the Service Delivery Network services can be found in the corresponding briefs.

#### Up-front Investments

- » Refurbishment / Branding of space within the Social Hygiene Clinic: PHP 785,000

#### Recurring costs per year

- » Staffing of Sundown Clinic (including security guard): PHP 1,536,000

#### Total Cost (1st yr)

- » PHP 2,321,000

“It helps that we are in a period where communicating can be discreet, so the males who have sex with males can easily confide to a peer educator or a nurse before and after a test,” says Clinic Head Dr. Ruiz. “This also helps males who have sex with males to ask around for available services even after office hours, which Klinika Bernardo can provide.”

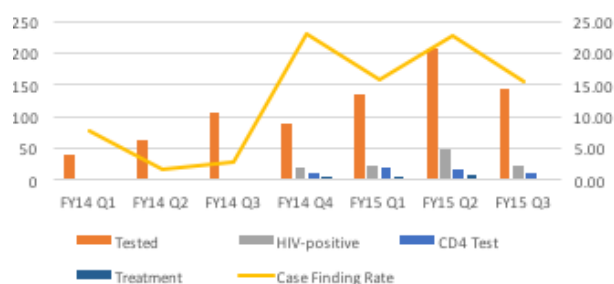
But staff stress that perhaps the most powerful communications tool is word-of-mouth, which they encourage by providing fast, friendly and professional services to earn their clients’ trust. “Unlike in the hospitals, they are not so exposed here. They see the quality of peer education that we are giving, the counseling and [motivational interviewing] sessions that we are doing,” explains Case Management Coordinator Mark Lawrence Galla, a nurse at Klinika Bernardo. “Our clients keep coming back, and they are bringing more clients – their friends – to us.”

### ► Measuring Success

Klinika Bernardo is focused on making data-driven program improvements and tracking clients’ progress from prevention and testing to care and treatment.

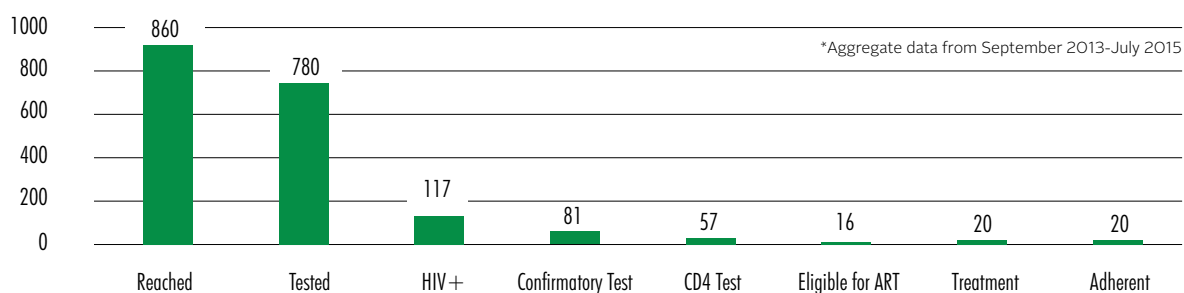
From April to June 2015, the clinic provided counseling and testing for 143 males who have sex with males and transgender clients, a 267% increase over performance during the first quarter for which data were tracked (Figure 1). The case finding rate was 15.4%, compared with 7.7% when the project launched. Klinika Bernardo has clearly demonstrated success at testing more clients and identifying more people living with the human immunodeficiency virus.

Fig. 1: HIV Services Cascade, October 2013-June 2015



\*Data presented through June 2015 because full data not available for quarter 4

Fig. 2: HIV Services Cascade, Project to Date



The clinic has also achieved successes in improving treatment retention. Figure 2 shows the aggregate data. Eighty-eight percent of individuals recruited through the ROMP project received a test for the human immunodeficiency virus and, because of the clinic’s emphasis on same-day reporting, 100% of those clients tested at the clinic received their test result.

Additionally, 90% of clients eligible for antiretroviral treatment have initiated treatment, and 100% of those on treatment are adherent. The major “leak” is that clients living with the human immunodeficiency virus continue to be lost to follow-up waiting for Western Blot confirmatory testing. Providing rapid CD4 counts for positive clients has also remained a challenge, even with a point-of-care CD4 machine, because of the difficulty securing testing cartridges.

“[Klinika Bernardo] is the first ever male sundown clinic in the Philippines – we better improve it and invest in [this model],” says Quezon City Mayor Herbert Bautista, who has taken a keen interest in stemming the tide of human immunodeficiency virus infections among males who have sex with males and transgender women in his city. “There may be other places in the country where our experience is happening, only that we don’t know about them. Klinika Bernardo should serve as a wake-up call to the government.”

#### ► Challenges Ahead

The staff of Klinika Bernardo note that, as available services continue to expand, the work of managing clients across these services becomes increasingly complex.

“The task multiplies for monitoring patients who are taking antiretroviral drugs, and then tuberculosis drugs, and then injections and other medicines for their other infections,” explains Dr. Ruiz. “Complaints about side effects are common, but staff still need to find ways to support their patients and encourage treatment adherence.”

Klinika Bernardo has a good relationship with the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine and San Lazaro Hospital, and staff hope for better coordination with tertiary referral hospitals to address other medical needs. The clinic also has an agreement with St. Camillus, a faith-based organization, to provide weekly psychosocial services, but clinic staff say they need round-the-clock availability of healthcare professionals qualified to offer psychosocial support.

One way to manage the increased caseload at Klinika Bernardo is by branching out, a strategy embraced by the Quezon City government, which recently created a second sundown clinic, Klinika Novaliches. This clinic was also supported by the United States Agency for International Development, FHI 360 and Klinika Bernardo. The expansion of this model in Quezon City is expected to be complemented with additional financial support from the local government unit.