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**GPS Mapping of Traditional Healers in South Africa:  
Preparation for clinical trial training rural traditional health  
practitioners on HIV testing and counseling**



**Introduction:** In South Africa, people of low socioeconomic status, men, people in rural areas, and those who distrust the health system have higher rates of HIV stigma and are less likely to receive an HIV test. These individuals are also more likely to see a traditional healer for their health care needs, making healers an ideal group to bridge the health care utilization divide. To reach people who otherwise avoid testing, our team will conduct a cluster randomized controlled trial, comparing testing uptake in communities with trained traditional health practitioners conducting HIV testing and counseling with standard of care communities.

**Methods:** In preparation for the clinical trial, GPS data on all healers previously mapped in the region was investigated. The data were cleaned, GPS data were validated, and trends in location, healer gender and education levels as well as location were assessed. To facilitate the trial recruitment, regions with fewer healers were flagged for additional investigation. New Redcap and Excel forms were created to efficiently track healer data.

**Results:** Through data cleaning and analysis of the existing traditional healer surveyed, we distinguished over 1600 healers. Approximately 581 healers had been recorded with GPS coordinates within the Bushbuckridge area. Of these healers 69.36% are female, 18.42 are male, and 12.22 gender is unknown. There is an age distribution of 18 – 94 years old. The mapping of these healers shows that the healers are concentrated in rural areas, away from clinics and the larger, more densely populated areas.

**Conclusions:** There is evidence of a greater concentration of healers in the rural communities, suggesting the demand for their services is higher in these areas. People living in rural communities are less likely to test for HIV regularly, highlighting the importance of training healers to conduct HIV testing in rural communities.