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Additional Information on the Research Setting:

The infectious diseases unit of Imam Khomeini Hospital Complex (IKHC) includes 13 physicians, who are faculty members at TUMS and members of the Iranian Academy of Sciences, serving as advisors for health programming and guideline development. Additionally, 17 residents specialising in infectious diseases and 32 nurses staff the infectious diseases unit. The VCT centre, which is mainly focused on HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, includes a team of four physicians and two counsellors. The Positive Club is under the oversight of the VCT centre. IRCHA and its 8 full-time researchers and research assistants collaborate with the VCT and the positive club.

Additional Information on Routine Care:

Patients are expected to visit the clinic monthly to receive free medication refills and clinical examinations. Counselling on adherence is offered to patients who miss monthly visits or report problems with medication adherence, viral suppression, or treatment resistance. As part of the routine care, a mandatory check-up with an infectious disease specialist is also offered every three months for patients with clinical signs of non-adherence or signs of irregular medication pick up. The Positive Club offers additional counselling and support, on referral, for PLHIV who are facing adherence or psychosocial difficulties. The intervention group will also receive these routine services, in addition to the HamRaah intervention, which includes independent counsellors to prevent risk of contamination.

Additional Information on HamRaah Intervention:

When contact is triggered, the counsellor will enquire about the problems the patient may be facing, or the reasons for missing doses. The counsellor will be selected from the pool of locally trained psychologists, most of whom receive CBT training, to ensure PLHIV are treated sensitively and professionally on the phone. As such, the intervention is not meant to provide CBT through messaging, but rather differentiate patients who may need a one-time over-the-phone support from those who need to be referred for additional and more long-term support. However, if long-term support is needed, the counsellor, familiar with IKHC resources, will refer the patient accordingly and tailored to his/her needs to further services, in such a way to ensure HamRaah is boosting access to
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available healthcare capacities. For example, patients who are facing mental health challenges will be encouraged to accept a referral to counselling to help patients address any emotional or cognitive barriers to ART use. Additionally, they could be linked to the peer-support offered at the Positive Club, which also provides educational, motivational, and skill-building classes, and where both PLHIV and trained psychologists operate a variety of weekly classes to help patients address barriers to adherence through problem solving and encouraging good habit formation. In cases where medical counselling and clinical treatment are necessary, appropriate referrals are offered.

Thus, HamRaah aims to promote adherence to ART as primary outcome. It also aims to streamline the process through which newly diagnosed PLHIV access available health services that meet their needs in a timely window, before critical care becomes necessary. The weekly check-in schedule could also prevent prolonged gaps in adherence that increase the risk of viral rebound. It also seeks to promote good medication-taking habits to achieve optimal longer-term outcomes.