

“MANAGING OUR HIV” WORKSHOP SERIES

3

“MANAGING OUR HIV” WORKSHOP SERIES is a group level intervention designed to provide a better understanding of medications and basic health management to HIV+ individuals initiating or having difficulty managing their HIV treatment. The key characteristics of the “Managing Our HIV” Workshop Series are: the confidential nature of the workshops which helps clients to feel “safe” discussing their HIV infection; the use of non-technical language in workshop materials; and the provision of transportation, which allows clients from remote areas to participate.

CURRENT ACTIVITY SETTING

Community Health Center,
Early Intervention Clinic

Directly links the client to medical care

✓ Gets the client in a conversation about starting medical care

Brings the agency closer to where HIV+ people are so that the conversation can begin

I. DESCRIPTION

OBJECTIVES

- ▶▶ To strengthen clinic patients’ ability, through a group intervention, to adhere to their recommended treatment regimens
- ▶▶ To help patients develop tips and strategies that will help to make medication adherence manageable and their lives easier
- ▶▶ To encourage patients to become active in their health care
- ▶▶ To provide patients with information that helps them understand how HIV specific medications affect their bodies
- ▶▶ To help increase CD4 counts and lower viral loads through adherence to medication

POPULATION SERVED

- ▶▶ Patients living in rural or remote areas who are having difficulty adhering to anti-retroviral medications
- ▶▶ Patients who are initiating anti-retroviral medications

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

“Managing Our HIV” Workshop Series provides HIV+ individuals with a safe group environment in which to learn about HIV disease and ways to adhere to medication regimens and build strong relationships with medical providers.



QUICK NOTES:

“I say to patients, ‘HIV moved in with you—you didn’t move in with it. So you have to be the head of your household and take control.’”

— HIV EDUCATOR

Development and Preparation

- ▶▶ The clinic decides to offer a workshop series on HIV infection, its symptoms and treatment regimens, adherence to medication, nutrition, and safer sex practices.
- ▶▶ The HIV educator, who is responsible for coordinating the workshops, meets with clinic care providers to describe the workshop series and to ask them to refer patients who are either starting or having problems adhering to their treatment regimens.
- ▶▶ S/he lines up appropriate facilitators for the workshops and asks them to prepare presentations.
- ▶▶ Next, s/he creates a “Certificate of Completion” which participants will receive upon successfully completing the workshop series.
- ▶▶ The educator develops a budget for the workshop and secures funding to cover food as well as gift certificates—an incentive for completing the series successfully.
- ▶▶ The educator develops and distributes a flyer advertising the workshop and each session.
- ▶▶ Providers send the educator the contact information for the patients whom they have referred.
- ▶▶ The educator calls each person and invites them to participate, telling them about the content, stressing the different ways attending can be beneficial, and highlighting the free food, gift certificate, and travel assistance available to participants. If a person seems uninterested, the educator follows up with a later call to encourage them once again to attend.
- ▶▶ Each class is limited to ten participants. The educator reserves a private room in a clinic for the five weekly workshops that comfortably accommodates the size of the class.
- ▶▶ Once the workshop roster is full, the educator makes arrangements for transportation services (i.e., bus tickets and van pick-up appointments) for each session, giving priority to clients traveling from rural areas of the county.
- ▶▶ The educator prepares participant packets that include a copy of the facilitator’s Power Point slides and additional information on the subject to be covered in the first session. A similar packet is distributed at the beginning of each class.
- ▶▶ The clinic’s security staff is alerted to the time and location of the workshop. To protect client confidentiality, security monitors traffic to the room, stopping individuals who are not registered for the workshop from entering.

Five Week Curriculum

Week One: *Stop and Think: HIV 101 and Introductions*

- ▶▶ The first session has two health educators as facilitators, one of whom is HIV+.
- ▶▶ One of the two begins by introducing the five sessions, handing each participant the circulating flyer.
- ▶▶ The HIV+ facilitator discloses his/her status.
- ▶▶ The participants introduce themselves to the group.
- ▶▶ Food is served, and participants eat as the session begins. Engaging in a social activity, such as eating, allows clients to feel more comfortable talking and sharing information. All remaining sessions begin with the serving of a meal.
- ▶▶ As participants eat, a facilitator explains the rules of the sessions, stressing the confidentiality agreement. To support the confidentiality of the group, no one other than the registered participants—all of whom are HIV+—is allowed to attend the sessions.
- ▶▶ A facilitator explains the workshop incentives: \$15 gift certificates for participants who attend all five sessions and, for winning an exercise, the selection of a caterer for the next session.
- ▶▶ A facilitator follows with a presentation on HIV, how it affects the body, and some possible symptoms of opportunistic infections.
- ▶▶ Next, the facilitators lead a group discussion on treatment regimens, inviting the group to participate by asking, “What tips do you have for taking medications?”
- ▶▶ They administer a written quiz that asks patients to read vignettes of different pill-taking styles and select the one with which they most identify.
- ▶▶ A facilitator leads a discussion about participants’ responses, attitudes, and styles of taking medications.
- ▶▶ At the closing of the first session, a facilitator introduces the next session’s topic and distributes a business card encouraging participants to get in touch if any needs arise (such as transportation) before the next session.

- ▶ Participants are told of any relevant community events on HIV and treatment management, and offered additional incentives to attend the events.

Week Two: *Ready, Set, Go: Difficulties with Adherence and My Provider and Me*

- ▶ The second session is facilitated by the same two individuals as the first session.
- ▶ The facilitator who is HIV+ takes the lead and reviews highlights from the first session; the other educator co-facilitates.
- ▶ The lead describes how HIV works in the body and how “classes” of medications function in the body, using stories and analogies to explain complex concepts.
- ▶ The lead shares with participants his/her own experience with medications and leads an informal discussion about side effects and symptoms and how participants can manage them.
- ▶ The other HIV educator facilitates the first of several exercises that occur over the course of the second, third, and fourth workshops. For example, s/he might read scenarios about people living with HIV and invite the participants to suggest ways for them to improve their health and well-being.
- ▶ Following the exercise, the lead facilitator begins a discussion about the relationship participants have with their current health care provider. The participants are coached on the questions to ask a provider, the information they should disclose during various appointments, and when they ought to reveal “secret” issues relating to their health (e.g., substance use).
- ▶ The lead facilitator stresses the importance of attending each medical appointment and emphasizes that participants must be involved in their health care by asking questions and never leaving an appointment without understanding everything the provider has told them.
- ▶ Lastly, the lead facilitator opens a lengthy discussion on provider-client relationships, where participants often share personal experiences.
- ▶ At closing, a facilitator announces any relevant community events participants can attend.

Week Three: *Eating Healthy: Nutrition and HIV*

- ▶ A nutritionist facilitates this session and explains what foods the participants can add to their diets in order to help ease the side effects of HIV medications.
- ▶ For participants who want it, the nutritionist then offers one-on-one counseling on nutrition and HIV health management.
- ▶ The participants regroup and ask questions of the nutritionist.

Week Four: *What About the Sex Thing? Safer Sex Education*

- ▶ One of the HIV educators facilitates this session, which focuses on how participants can engage in safer sex, including sex with HIV+ or sero-discordant partners, and demonstrates proper use of condoms (female and male) and dental dams.
- ▶ The HIV educator opens conversation, explaining the health consequences of unprotected sex and discourages it.
- ▶ Then, the educator coordinates a theme and audience-appropriate game. For example, there is a fantasy game that is appropriate for a group of mostly female participants: Celebrity Groove Bag. Participants grab a prop from a bag, which contains a mix of sensual products (e.g., massage oil, a stiletto shoe). Each woman describes how she would use the item to be intimate with the celebrity of her choice without having intercourse. The game helps to raise the comfort level for participants, giving the facilitator the opportunity to demonstrate how to negotiate and apply a condom in a sensual, playful manner that does not interrupt the mood of intimacy.
- ▶ After the game, the HIV educator leads a question and answer session that closes the workshop.

Week Five: *Wrapping-It-Up Q &A, Celebration, and Presentation of Certificates*

- ▶ Participants complete evaluations of the series, identifying what they found most useful, what they liked or disliked, and what they wish the series had included.
- ▶ Next, the HIV educator leads a group conversation on what the participants learned and how they changed. Participants are asked to share “tips” they can now give others on managing HIV.
- ▶ The HIV educator plays music and creates a festive atmosphere for this closing session.
- ▶ The HIV educator leads a graduation ceremony in which clients walk to receive their certificates of completion and gift certificates.
- ▶ The group spends the remaining time socializing in a low-key, informal setting.

PROMOTION OF ACTIVITY

A flyer advertising the workshop series is sent via e-mail to health care providers at the clinic and to local substance abuse treatment centers. It is also posted throughout the clinic, handed out to patients in the clinic waiting room, and advertised in the clinic newsletter.

I. LOGISTICS

STAFF REQUIRED

- ▶ Health educator to organize, facilitate, and evaluate the training
- ▶ HIV educator/counselor who is HIV+ to co-facilitate
- ▶ Guest speakers from the community
- ▶ Case manager to transport rural patients to session

TRAINING & SKILLS

- ▶ All facilitators must have an understanding of HIV infection and basic knowledge of anti-retroviral medications and treatment adherence.
- ▶ Facilitators must be knowledgeable about safer sex practices and have familiarity with common misconceptions in the community about HIV and safer sex.
- ▶ Facilitators should have familiarity with the vernacular or “slang” used by the target population.

PLACE OF ACTIVITY

- ▶ Conference room at the health clinic, equipped with an overhead projector or LCD screen, a table and enough chairs to accommodate speakers and participants.
- ▶ The workshop can also take place at meetings of substance abuse and mental health support groups for HIV+ individuals.

FREQUENCY OF ACTIVITY

A workshop series starts every month and meets weekly for five sessions.

OUTSIDE CONSULTANTS

Training consultant for two medication and adherence sessions

SUPPORT SERVICES

- ▶ The case manager, using a van provided by the clinic, picks up and drops off patients who lack means of transportation.
- ▶ Roundtrip bus tickets are provided to participants who live on a bus route.

CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The workshops must take place in a convenient, enclosed, and “intimate” space that is clean enough to eat in and is not cramped.

III. STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES

STRENGTHS

- ▶▶ One facilitator is HIV+.
- ▶▶ Games and activities facilitate dynamic participation by getting participants involved and interested in the subject matter.
- ▶▶ The confidential nature of the workshops allows participants to be open. It gives them an opportunity to ask questions they don't ask their medical providers.
- ▶▶ The facilitators present the information in a less technical language than many providers.
- ▶▶ Spoken communication helps continually engage participants who may have few or no literacy skills.
- ▶▶ The use of analogies and figurative speech helps to stimulate the interest of people who initially are disengaged.
- ▶▶ Participants have an opportunity to meet people they can relate to in a safe environment.

WEAKNESSES

- ▶▶ Attendance is highly dependent on the \$15 incentive.
- ▶▶ There is a low percentage of male participants.

DIFFICULTIES FOR CLIENTS

- ▶▶ Participants who have problems adhering to medications may also have problems adhering to the schedule of workshop sessions.
- ▶▶ Certain clinic patients don't feel the need to attend the workshops because they don't feel ill.
- ▶▶ The time of day that the workshop is held poses a problem for some participants.
- ▶▶ Five sessions isn't sufficient to cover all the relevant issues for people who have been on medication for some period of time.

DIFFICULTIES FOR STAFF

- ▶▶ It can be challenging to get clinic patients to attend and actively participate in each session.
- ▶▶ Some classes are smaller than others because there are fewer new patients within the network who are beginning anti-retroviral treatment.
- ▶▶ Five sessions isn't sufficient to cover all the relevant issues for people who have been on medication for a period of time.

OBSTACLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

None

ACTIVITY NOT SUITED FOR

- ▶▶ Non-English speakers if there is no translator or bilingual staff
- ▶▶ People under the age of 18

IV. OUTCOMES

EVALUATION

- ▶▶ Agency administers a pre- and post-workshop written and oral questionnaire to participants on their pill-taking styles.
- ▶▶ Participants complete a final written evaluation of the program.

- ▶▶ The HIV educator reviews patients' medical charts to track CD4 counts, viral loads and the scheduling and completion of medical provider appointments.
- ▶▶ The HIV educator tracks the clinic's "no-show" lists for workshop participants.
- ▶▶ The agency monitors participant workshop attendance through the use of a spreadsheet.
- ▶▶ The agency receives provider feedback.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- ▶▶ Medical providers report that patients who participate in the workshop show a greater interest in their own health care.
- ▶▶ Staff observes participants meeting people and discussing their health and life situations.
- ▶▶ Staff observes that participants get motivated as they see their viral levels go down.

UNANTICIPATED BENEFITS

Participants report that they have more faith in the medications.

"CONNECTING TO CARE" ELEMENTS OF ACTIVITY

- ▶▶ The HIV+ facilitator is essential to reaching and influencing other HIV+ people. As someone who is healthy and taking medication, s/he can relate to clients and reassure them.
- ▶▶ The activity explains the virus and the effect of medications on the body, allowing clients to visualize what occurs in their body. This helps the participants think in a new way about what they can do and to realize the importance of taking medications.
- ▶▶ The activity encourages participants to "buddy up" and help to support others in the group.
- ▶▶ Participants are able to meet and talk with other HIV+ people in a safe environment, which can often be difficult for people living in rural settings.
- ▶▶ Often patients don't feel comfortable asking questions of medical providers, and this activity allows them to discuss issues and concerns in a comfortable, peer environment.
- ▶▶ The activity allows for extended conversations with counselors who have more time to talk about medication issues than medical providers do.
- ▶▶ The transportation service allows individuals from remote areas to participate.

KEEP IN MIND...

- ▶▶ All facilitators need to be well-informed and prepared to answer clients' numerous questions.
- ▶▶ Make sure there is funding available for incentives.
- ▶▶ Keep an accurate account of participant attendance.
- ▶▶ Make sure the food provided for each workshop is tasty and nutritious so that it reinforces the nutritional information participants receive in the session.
- ▶▶ A newly diagnosed participant who is in denial about his/her status can often steer the first session's focus to their specific needs.