PROJECT INFORMATION

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Using a Palliative Approach Early in HIV Care -- The CASA Study

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What was the research about?

Palliative approaches to health care focus on improving patients' quality of life by preventing and reducing suffering. Many people believe that health workers use palliative approaches only when patients are at the end of life. But health workers can use palliative approaches any time when caring for patients with a serious illness.

In this study, the research team trained health workers to use a palliative approach, along with usual care, in early care for HIV. HIV is a virus that makes it hard for the body to fight infections. HIV is a serious illness, but patients with HIV can have long lives with the right treatment.

The palliative approach in this study included

- Learning patients' beliefs, values, and priorities
- Adjusting health goals on a regular basis based on patient, family, and staff input
- Managing symptoms that affect quality of life, such as pain, depression, and anxiety
- Giving health workers tips for talking to patients about difficult topics

The research team compared using the palliative approach early in HIV care with usual HIV care alone in improving well-being and quality of life for patients with HIV. The patients identified as young, same-gender loving men.

What were the results?

The study didn't find differences between patients who received the palliative approach early in their HIV care and those who received usual HIV care in

- Distress caused by HIV symptoms
- Mental well-being
- Quality of life
- Closely following their HIV treatment plans

Patients who received the palliative approach reported fewer symptoms over time that bothered them a lot.

Who was in the study?

The study included 197 patients ages 18 to 35 who had HIV and identified as same-gender loving men. Patients received care from one of two HIV clinics in Baltimore, Maryland. Of these patients, 78 percent were black, 6 percent were white, and 7 percent were other races; also, 9 percent were Hispanic. The average age was 29.

What did the research team do?

The research team trained staff at one clinic on how to add the palliative approach to usual HIV care. Staff at a nearby clinic continued to provide usual care only. Patients at both clinics completed surveys at the start of the study and again 6 and 12 months later.

Patients living with HIV, HIV health workers, family members of people who died from HIV, and young,

same-gender loving men provided feedback during the study.

What were the limits of the study?

Clinic staff may not have been able to use the palliative approach long enough for the research team to see an effect on the patients. The study took place in only one city. Results may differ in other cities.

How can people use the results?

Researchers can use these results when thinking about other ways to use palliative care to see if it can help improve care for patients with HIV.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Alexander197.