

# Helping People Living with HIV Learn Skills to Manage Their Care

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### What was the research about?

Patients who feel confident that they can manage and improve their health often have better health outcomes than patients who are not as confident. Patients with complex health problems such as HIV can benefit from learning skills to manage their health. These skills include carefully monitoring symptoms, taking medicine as prescribed, and tracking side effects.

In this study, the research team created a program for patients with HIV to improve skills for managing their health. The program included an iPod app, group-based training, a meeting with a health coach, and training for doctors.

### What were the results?

Compared with those who weren't in the program, patients in the program

- Felt more able to manage their health
- Could find health information online and understand how to apply the information to their own care

The program did not affect whether patients took their medicine as prescribed or whether they felt involved in their care. It didn't affect patients' health and well-being or the preventive care the patients received. It also didn't affect the amount of virus in patients' blood.

### Who was in the study?

The study included 360 adult patients with HIV living in New York and New Jersey. Patients were from diverse backgrounds. The average patient age was about 51. About half of the patients had never used an iPod.

### What did the research team do?

The research team recruited patients from eight clinics in New York and New Jersey. The team assigned the patients to one of two groups by chance. One group was in the program; the other was not. Patients in the program received an iPod with a health-record app designed for people with HIV. The team trained patients to use the iPod and to put health data into the app, and the team encouraged patients to take the iPod to their next doctor visit. Health coaches helped patients in the program prepare for their next visit with their doctor. Patients receiving usual care visited their doctors as they normally would.

The team trained doctors treating patients in both groups to help patients feel more confident about managing their health care.

Patients with HIV, HIV doctors, staff from two HIV service organizations, and other healthcare providers gave input about how to do the study.

### What were the limits of the study?

Many patients in the study had no detectable level of HIV, which made it hard for the research team to see a change in HIV level. Patients in the program met with a health coach only once, and the research team measured results after patients in the program had seen their doctor just once. The program may not

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have been enough for patients to make a change in health or health care. The study took place only in two states; the results may not apply to patients in other places.

Future research could have patients meet with a health coach more than once and measure results after more than one doctor's visit.

## **How can people use the results?**

Health centers and doctors could use this program to help HIV patients feel more able to manage their health and find health information online and apply it to their own care.

*To learn more about this project, visit [pcori.org/Fiscella063](http://pcori.org/Fiscella063).*