People With HIV Stay in Care if Doctors Appear to Care

May 21, 2013

Clinicians whose interpersonal skills rate more highly with their HIV patient population are more likely to retain those people in care, aidsmap reports. A recent study out of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore of their urban HIV clinic investigating how doctor-patient relationships may affect the critical issue of patient retention in care has found that those patients who were most likely to keep their appointments felt their clinicians knew them as people, treated them with dignity and respect, listened carefully to them and provided easily understood explanations. The study was published in the online edition of the Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes.

The study involved 2,363 HIV-positive participants receiving care at the Hopkins clinic between 2005 and 2009. The participants rated the quality of their care and their relationship with their care providers through a computer-assisted questionnaire. They rated according to five areas: being treated with dignity and respect, being involved in decisions in regard to care, feeling listened to, having information explained in easily understandable ways, and feeling known as a person.

On average, the participants attended about two-thirds of their appointments. Those who felt known as a person observed their appointments at a rate 6 percent higher than those who did not feel this way. The improved attendance rates for those who rated their clinicians the highest in regards to being treated with dignity and respect, always receiving easily understandable explanations, and being listened to carefully, were a respective 7, 7 and 6 percent, when compared with those who rated their clinicians more poorly in these regards.

To the investigators' surprise, those who rated care providers highly for involving them in decision making were no more likely to make it to their appointments.

The authors suggested that "[e]nhancing providers' skills in effective communication and relationship-building may improve patient retention in care."

To read the aidsmap story, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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