

Integrating Services for Improved Access to Oral Health Care in People Living with HIV/ AIDS

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Introduction

- Oral health problems in People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) are common and access to oral health care for PLWHA remains disparate and inadequate.
- A study estimates that approximately 52% of PLWHA have not seen an oral health professional in more than 2 years.
- Engaging Ryan White HIV/ AIDS program medical providers in oral health promotion, integration of medical-dental electronic health records (EHR), and encouraging appropriate referrals to oral health providers facilitates access to oral health care in PLWHA.

TWCCH Approach

- Co-location of Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program clinic and TWCCH Dental clinic further improves accessibility.
- The Wright Center's Ryan White HIV Clinic, located in northeastern Pennsylvania, provides comprehensive medical services – including primary care, dental, behavioral health and recovery services as well as essential support services and medical case management.
- Our study aims to assess the effectiveness of integration of medical and dental services in improving access to oral health care in PLWHA through co-location, coordination, and referral mechanisms.

- This cross-sectional retrospective study at The Wright Center (TWC), Pennsylvania with co-located Ryan White HIV Clinics and Oral health clinics. Active patients of the TWC Ryan White HIV Clinic were included in the study from December 1, 2019 to December 1, 2021 (AP). The number of active patients who have availed services at the co-located Oral Health Clinic were then studied. Qualitative data was analyzed to learn the effectiveness of co-location of dental services and physician referral in seeking oral care among PLWHA.

- A progressive increase in the proportion of active patients (AP) treated at the co-located dental clinic was seen:
 - 2.14% (n=514) in 2019,
 - 18.29% (n=492) in 2020,
 - 23.74% (n=497) in 2021.

Furthermore, our study indicates that approximately 94% (n=51) Ryan White HIV Clinic patients who availed dental services at our clinic through Ryan White HIV/ AIDS program funding were referred by in-organization physicians in the year 2021.

Lessons Learned

- PLWHA have reported high rates of unmet oral health care needs and low utilization of oral health services.
- Communication, coordination, and referral mechanisms between medical and dental providers are effective in improving access to oral health care among PLWHA.
- Co-location of medical and dental care offers enhanced accessibility to oral health care among PLWHA.

Challenges/ Limitations

- The data included only 2 HIV clinics in Northeastern Pennsylvania and does not represent all the co-located medical and dental centers for PLWHA.
- The preliminary data indicates only an association between colocation and the increase in the patients seeking oral care.
- A multi-centered study focusing on measuring oral health treatment outcomes in co-located medical and dental centers would help developing an innovative system-level model to improve oral healthcare among PLWHA.