

Innovative Linkage to Care Outcomes between an ED and Community Provider Partnership

Heather Henderson^{1,2}, Rebecca Nessen³, Jason Wilson^{1,2}, Oluwatobi Ozoya²

¹University of South Florida

²Division of Emergency Medicine, Dept of Internal Medicine, Tampa General Hospital

³Metro Inclusive Health

Background

Established in 1927 Tampa General Hospital (TGH) is a private not-for-profit hospital and one of the most comprehensive medical facilities in Florida serving a dozen counties with a population in excess of four million. In 2017 fiscal year, there were 84,186 adult and 11,124 pediatric Emergency & Trauma Center Visits. TGH is the primary teaching hospital for the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine. As the region's leading safety net hospital, Tampa General is committed to providing area residents with excellent and compassionate health care ranging from the simplest to the most complex medical services.

Metropolitan Charities, Inc. d/b/a Metro Inclusive Health (METRO) was incorporated in 1992 as a 501(c)(3) organization committed to providing quality health and wellness services that are inclusive, relevant, supportive and represent the lifetime continuum of the diverse people in Tampa Bay, St. Petersburg, and the surrounding areas. METRO provides comprehensive primary and preventive medical care, HIV/sexually transmitted infection (STI) outreach and prevention, health and wellness education, behavioral health, substance use, enabling services, youth and older adult programs, social activities, classes, support groups, and other services.

Since its beginnings, METRO has continued to develop services that meet the unique health care needs of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community, and all persons seeking care. METRO is unique in that it was the first and remains the only HIV/AIDS Service Organization in the Tampa/St. Petersburg region to offer a fully-integrated, comprehensive, one-stop, health care home and wraparound service model of care.

Metro's Health Center operates as an integrated HHS defined Medical Home, delivering primary and HIV medical care services, fully integrated into community based programming, that are patient-centered, comprehensive and accessible. Providers deliver culturally competent medical care for the HIV positive and broader LGBT population as well as the greater community, meeting individuals where they are. This compassionate care delivered in a community based setting enables strong, trusting relationships to be built between providers and patients, encouraging open dialogue, more comprehensive treatment, and higher retention rates.

Objective

Tampa General Hospital Emergency Department (TGH ED) and Metro Inclusive Health (Metro) serve Hillsborough and Pinellas counties – two of the seven counties in Florida identified as geographic hotspots in the Ending the HIV Epidemic Plan for America. TGH and Metro helped pioneer HIV and Hepatitis C screening and helped position their region to end the epidemic.

Methods

TGH and Metro became FOCUS partners and operationalized routine HIV/Hepatitis C screening and linkage to care. All patients receive an HIV/Hepatitis C test unless they decline. Routine screening is integrated into the institutions' clinical workflow by embracing smart screening algorithms, Florida's HIV Testing statute and CDC screening recommendations. Routine screening is helping to reduce the number of undiagnosed, decrease the number of those who are diagnosed late and ensure strong linkage to care.

Results

In the first 24 months of opt-out screening, Metro Inclusive Health performed 40,100 HIV tests with 1.1% seropositivity and 32,333 HCV tests with 4.9% HCV Ab positivity rate and 1.4% HCV RNA+ positivity rate. The volume and seropositivity highlighted the need for collaboration. The blood-based screening also enabled the institutions to identify acute infections, which enhanced the urgency to link individuals to care. TGH and Metro developed a "Red Carpet Linkage" process, which included same day appointments if the patient chose Metro. Linkage to care for HIV and Hepatitis C is 83% and 66%, respectively.

Table 1: Linkage to Care rates for Tampa General Hospital before Metro Inclusive Health Collaboration

2017 Before Collaboration	HIV	HCV
# Ab of positive patients	113	722
Ab seropositivity	0.9%	6%
# of RNA positive patients	n/a	334
# / % Linked to care	72 / 64%	162 / 49%

Table 2: Linkage to Care rates for Tampa General Hospital after Metro Inclusive Health Collaboration

May 2018-April 1 2020	HIV	HCV
# Ab of positive patients	447	1570
Ab seropositivity	1.1%	4.9%
# of RNA Positives	n/a	447
#/% RNA Positives Linked to care	371 / 83%	293 / 66%



Conclusion

Metro and TGH are community champions for ending the HIV epidemic and forged a collaborative "Red Carpet Linkage" process ensuring all HIV positive individuals have streamlined access to medical care, regardless of insurance status. This partnership provides access to Ryan White funded programs (via Metro) such as Medical Case Management, Infectious Disease Medical Care, and other supportive wraparound services (e.g., Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Counseling among others). This routine screening infrastructure and community partnership is a model approach for helping to end the HIV epidemic in Florida.

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Disclaimer

The FOCUS Program is a public health initiative that enables partners to develop and share best practices in routine blood-borne virus (HIV, HCV, HBV) screening, diagnosis, and linkage to care in accordance with screening guidelines promulgated by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), and state and local public health departments.

FOCUS funding supports HIV, HCV, and HBV screening and linkage to the first medical appointment after diagnosis. FOCUS partners do not use FOCUS awards for activities beyond linkage to the first medical appointment.