

Dental Case Managers: Increasing Access In HIV Dental Programs

Objective: To present focus group data gathered from new oral health care team members, dental case managers (DCM), highlighting breadth of roles and DCM impact on increasing access to oral health care for people with HIV.

Method: In 2006 HRSA funded 15 demonstration projects under the SPNS Oral Health Initiative to increase access to oral health care for persons living with HIV. Nine sites employ a staff member who serves as a DCM; a focus group of DCMs from these sites was convened in June 2008. Through guided discussion the group described their perceived impact in the programs, methods of collaboration with traditional HIV case managers, training needs, DCM qualifications, and applicability for dental programs for other populations.

Results: DCMs perceive that they are effective in reducing barriers to care, that non-dental personnel can be trained to work in this capacity, and that their major functions relate to outreach, retention and patient adherence to care. DCMs address barriers to care in a way that other HIV-care providers cannot: they perform fewer tasks per patient and thus can serve a higher volume of patients. Their educational role further differs in that they focus mainly on oral healthcare.

Conclusion: Case managers are used in HIV medical/support programs, but previously have not been dedicated to oral healthcare. DCMs employed in the HRSA/SPNS demonstration sites suggest they can be effective in facilitating access to comprehensive oral health care for people living with HIV/AIDS.