

PEER NAVIGATION; A PEER-BASED APPROACH IN HIGH HIV CASELOAD SETTING(S)

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Background: The Peer Navigation program is aimed at providing one on one support for people living with HIV, helping them achieve their goals and reach full physical and emotional wellbeing. With an understanding of the potential impact a HIV diagnosis can have on an individual, the Peer Navigation program was setup with the intent to allow newly diagnosed persons access to their HIV positive peers in an attempt to:

- improve literacy among people living with HIV on biomedical HIV prevention
- improve retention in care and treatment uptake
- address stigma and discrimination through a peer-based approach

Methods: Peer Navigators (PNs) act as HIV+ peer liaison officer available following an in-house referral at the time of (or soon after) new diagnoses. PNs role is an extension of clinical consult with aspects of emotional support and reassurance, supporting treatment readiness, and peer-supported referrals to community services.

Results: As a result of the implementation of the PN program at high caseload clinics:

- there has been an increase in treatment preparedness and readiness within persons who have been newly diagnosed
- support is available at a crucial time, at diagnosis, increasing the likelihood of persons diagnosed remaining in care
- there has been improvement in the quality of emotional support in high caseload clinics where staff are often limited by consultation times
- newly diagnosed persons are able to engage with their HIV+ peers who can assist in making positive behaviour changes and overcome challenges associated with their diagnosis

Conclusion: Considering the changing demographics/identities of persons affected by HIV, the PN team is unique in that it represents a spectrum of intersections within the Victorian community. The diversity of the PN team ensures the diversity of our reach when responding to persons affected.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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