

Positive Links

Warm Technology Activates HIV Care Linkage and Engagement

A TAILORED MOBILE APP TO SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT IN HIV CARE SHOWS GREAT PROMISE FOR SCALABILITY AND REPLICATION IN MANY COMMUNITIES



Background

The stages of HIV care, also known as the HIV care continuum, demonstrate significant gaps in HIV services, and efforts are underway at the federal, state, and local levels to develop and implement strategies to improve health outcomes for people living with HIV (PLWH). The HIV care continuum can be described by the following sequential steps: (1) diagnosis of HIV infection, (2) linkage to care, (3) retention in care, (4) receipt of antiretroviral therapy (ART), and (5) achievement of viral suppression (a very low level of HIV in the body). In the United States, there are 1.2 million people living with HIV, and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 30% had achieved viral suppression, which means that only 3 out of 10 people living with HIV had the virus under control. Viral suppression results in significantly improved health outcomes as well as dramatically decreased likelihood of HIV transmission (96% reduced risk of sexual transmission). The challenge of linking and retaining people living with HIV in care and treatment can be demonstrated by CDC data, which reveals that 14% of PLWH remain undiagnosed, and of those diagnosed, only 40% receive and stay in regular HIV medical care.¹ Successful retention in medical care is defined as one medical visit during each six month period of a 24-month interval, spaced more than 60 days apart, and this medical visit frequency improves survival, and allows people to be as healthy as possible.² Thus, the need to improve along the HIV care continuum plays a critical role in both care and prevention.



What Are We Doing?

Most people living with HIV/AIDS served by the University of Virginia Ryan White Clinic live in rural communities a significant distance from the clinic. Almost all face stigma. Substantial numbers struggle with depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use, intimate partner violence, and poverty. Unsurprisingly, clients report high levels of perceived stress. To address clients' multiple adherence-to-care challenges, The University of Virginia created **Positive Links (PL)**, a smartphone app that supports people living with HIV with HIV education and management tools, wellness promotion strategies, and support through:

- ▶ **Social Support** via a positive virtual community
- ▶ **Self-Monitoring** of adherence and wellness behaviors
- ▶ **Warm Technology** that extends care beyond clinic visits

CLIENT STORY

Positive Links offers opportunities for increased awareness of mood and stress levels to its participants. A participant who has had consistent use of the app describes what Positive Links has meant to him:

"Because HIV is so stigmatized, especially around here, it gives a relief. It's where I can talk and I can release, and express myself with some of the responses like mood and stress. I feel free to talk about my HIV. It's kinda like a diary-like thing. I can go in there, there's support there that I don't have in my day-to-day life. Where I can express and discuss, because I haven't told my family or anyone about my HIV. The questions make me focus on my mood and my stress and makes me more in touch with myself you can say. When it pops up, it makes me stop and think. I usually don't think about that kind of thing."

¹"HIV/AIDS Care Continuum." AIDS.gov. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 6 Mar. 2015. Web. 11 May 2015.

²"HAB HIV Performance Measures." Health Resources and Services Administration. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Nov. 2013. Web. 11 May 2015.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF POSITIVE LINKS

Social Support via a positive virtual community

Key Features

- ▶ 24/7 availability of support through a specific request to the virtual community message board (VCMB) or by observing and relating to what is shared on the VCMB by others
- ▶ Leadership skills development within a virtual peer group
- ▶ A sense of belonging to a unique community — the “Positive Links Family”
- ▶ The app design allows for ownership of the development/management of parameters of interactions and social norms within the group

Self-Monitoring of adherence and wellness behaviors — a key aspect of living well with a chronic disease

Key Features

- ▶ Calendar for tracking medical appointments
- ▶ Daily medication, mood, and stress queries
- ▶ Dashboard feature to assess adherence and wellness

Warm Technology that extends care beyond clinic visits

Key Features

- ▶ Cost-effective service delivery mechanism with over 100 potential contact points per patient per month
- ▶ Strengths-based counseling: delivered over the phone and via text to reach participants who cannot come into the clinic or make an appointment
- ▶ Real time feedback improves linkage between patient and appropriate clinical services

Added Value of Positive Links

- ▶ Participants see Positive Links not only as a project that they participate in, but also a community that they have helped to develop.
- ▶ The app design anticipated low literacy, which enables more users to benefit from the app.
- ▶ Privacy features, including secure data entry, are a unique feature differentiating it from other apps.
- ▶ Phone and data access have proven essential in participants accessing critical services and information.

Intervention Costs

Based on cost-analysis of the PL intervention, The University of Virginia has been able to determine that the PL intervention costs \$3,112.20 to enroll a new participant for a year, and the same cost (\$3,112.20) to continue the intervention for an existing participant for another year. Given that the cost per Positive Links participant is lower than recent modeling analyses, and our preliminary data analyses suggest greater than 40% improvement in retention by app users, we believe that Positive Links is cost-savings.

Clinic Overview

The University of Virginia Ryan White Clinic is the largest provider of HIV care in western Virginia, offering integrated HIV, gynecologic, mental health, substance abuse and specialty referral services to more than 700 people living with HIV/AIDS. The clinic benefits from strong links with the local AIDS service organization and the Virginia Department of Health.



PROGRAM CONTACT

University of Virginia Ryan White Clinic, 1300 Jefferson Park Ave., Charlottesville, VA 22908 – healthsystem.virginia.edu