

Duo Project: Relationship Factors and HIV Treatment Adherence

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Project Description

The DUO Project investigates how relationship factors are associated with adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART). Based on recruitment feasibility and the epidemiology of the HIV epidemic in the San Francisco area, HIV+ seroconcordant and serodiscordant male couples are included in the study's three phases:

- **Phase 1** We conducted a qualitative investigation of relationship dynamics and partner tactics related to HIV medication adherence.
- **Phase 2** We developed a medication adherence-specific measure of partner support, including specific tactics informed by Phase 1.
- **Phase 3** We are conducting computer-assisted structured interviews of 300 couples to
 - Validate the adherence-specific measure of partner support developed in Phase 2 and
 - Test hypotheses of the inter-relationships among individual-level variables (quality of life, psychological well-being, substance use) and couple-level variables (relationship satisfaction, conflict, adherence-specific partner support), and ART adherence and clinical variables. Clinical status is assessed by viral load and CD4 count.

Significance

Being in a primary relationship is believed to result in logistic and emotional support that provides health-promoting benefits. However, in a prior study of ART adherence among a large diverse sample of adults living with HIV, we detected a counterintuitive association in two separate samples between being in a primary relationship and worse adherence to medications. These findings raised the question of how relationship dynamics impact adherence to HIV treatment. This study seeks to add to the understanding of how couples interact around HIV medication in order to develop couples-based adherence interventions.

Interesting Findings

Partners offered a wide range of kinds of practical support, often tailored to partners' styles or to the changing process of adherence.

- Reminding
 - Regular reminding that was habitually offered
 - Situational reminding adapted to changing circumstances
 - Intensive reminding, either regular (i.e., nagging) or situational
- Instrumental helping
 - Monitoring medication adherence
 - Bringing or setting out medications at the dose time
 - Organizing the pills
 - Requesting and/or picking up refills
- Coaching
 - Situational problem-solving
 - Shaping behavior by reinforcing incremental gains and offering affirmations

Project Recruitment Dates: Phase 3 recruitment began in January 2009

Project End Date: May 2010