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Comprehensive Telehealth Program Offers Care Options for Rural Veterans Living with HIV/AIDS

For those living with HIV in rural areas, distance can be a barrier to receiving specialized medical treatment. To address this issue, VA investigators in Iowa City have developed a telehealth collaborative care (TCC) program to help increase access to care for rural patients. For this program, patients with HIV who lived closer to a local outpatient clinic than the HIV specialty clinic in Iowa City and who had a life expectancy of greater than 6 months were invited to participate. Thirty of 32 eligible patients chose to participate from 2010-2012. After two years of treatment, no patients elected to leave the TCC program in favor of traveling further for care and 14 out of 18 patients who returned a satisfaction survey indicated that they were very or completely satisfied with their most recent TCC visit. In qualitative interviews, initial patient concerns about privacy were found to be reduced or eliminated as the program continued, and patients reported benefitting from increased coordination of care through the TCC program.

Citation: *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 2013, 28(9): 1165-73. ◆

Did You Know?

- According to the World Health Organization, 35 million people globally live with HIV.
- HIV is the world's leading infectious cause of death.
- Nearly 1.2 million people in the U.S. are currently living with HIV.
- About 1 in 6 people in the U.S. who live with HIV are unaware of their infection. The VA recommends that all Veterans get tested at least once in their lifetime.
- Since 2010, the VA has increased the number of Veterans screened for HIV by 217%.
- In the U.S., African-Americans and Hispanics/Latinos are disproportionately affected by HIV. These two groups comprise 65% of all HIV infections in the U.S.
- HIV can be transmitted in a number of ways other than unprotected sexual contact, including by transfusion of contaminated blood, the sharing of contaminated needles or syringes, or the transmission from a mother to child through pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.
- Some key ways to prevent contraction of the HIV virus include: practicing safe sexual behavior, getting routinely tested, avoiding drug injections, and ensuring that potential blood transfusions are screened for HIV.



Sources: (www.va.gov, www.who.org, and www.cdc.gov) ◆

VA and HUD Announce 24% Reduction in Veteran Homelessness Since 2010

The VA, along with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), recently announced a 24% reduction in the number of homeless Veterans since 2010. “[The VA is] on the right track in the fight to end homelessness among Veterans,” noted Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki, referring to the Obama administration’s goal of ending Veterans’ homelessness by 2015. Earlier this year, the VA and HUD announced nearly \$70 million in Supportive Housing grants for Veterans which serve to partners VA case management and clinical services with HUD rental assistance. Additionally, in July, the VA awarded \$300 million in grants to 319 community agencies to assist nearly 50,000 homeless Veterans and their families who are now living in permanent housing due to joint VA-HUD programs. Another \$8.8 million was allocated to homeless providers to acquire vans and to rehabilitate housing for Veterans. Of note, the homeless are disproportionately affected by HIV. According to the 100,000 Homes Campaign, it is estimated that on average, about 3% of homeless Veterans (and 4% of all homeless people) are living with HIV compared to the less than 1% of people overall in the U.S. who are living with HIV.

Sources: (www.va.gov and www.nationalhomeless.org) ◆

