An electronic solution for improving patient consultation visits in routine HIV care

**The PROgress Study**

Duncan Short is Director of Global Implementation Science at VIV Healthcare, a London-based pharmaceutical company that is 100% dedicated to discovering and developing medicines for HIV treatment, prevention and cure. One of his responsibilities is leading the PROgress Project – a workstream to investigate whether a pre-consultation electronic tablet-based survey provided in the waiting room of an HIV clinic can provide valuable real-time insights to improve routine patient care. This may sound like a logical precept, but it is not without its difficulties. These include logistical implications for clinics to integrate this within clinic flow and acceptability challenges for both patients and care providers.

**THE CHALLENGES OF PATIENT-REPORTED OUTCOMES (PROs)**

Core to Short’s recent study is the concept of a patient-reported outcome (PRO) – information provided by a patient on their health condition that is not directed or explained by someone else, such as a healthcare professional. Formal PROs typically take the form of a questionnaire that touch on such aspects as a person’s mental health, social wellbeing, symptoms, health behaviours, and medication challenges. PROs are common valuable components in clinical trials, but they are used less so in direct patient–clinician appointments for several reasons. Firstly, form-filling takes time and effort on behalf of patients, and secondly, processing and analysing the assessments generate an extra administrative workload for busy clinic staff. In an HIV clinic, the face-to-face time between clinician and patient is frustratingly brief for both. However, the information patients can offer through PROs could be vital to the care they receive from their healthcare team. Hence the value of PRO assessment information to unlock the best support for an individual. So, the team wondered if there could be a way to create and integrate an easy-to-use, data-rich – but succinct – pre-consultation electronic PRO tool to help clinical staff in different types of clinics that could be adopted within routine HIV care at scale.

Working with the University of Washington’s Center for AIDS Research in Seattle, Washington, USA, and under the guidance of a steering committee that included PLHIV, clinic directors, HIV care providers, and healthcare researchers, the team tested a self-administered electronic tablet-based PRO assessment which was quick and effective. They were helped by two very different outpatient clinics: one within St Michael’s Hospital (SMH) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada; the other, the Midway Specialty Care Center (MSCC) in Fort Pierce, Florida, in the US. The two clinics also served different population needs and challenges. The study team’s concerns was such a PRO intervention feasible within routine practice, and would it be valuable?

**A SIMPLE BUT THOROUGHER DESIGN**

The study was conducted at the two clinics between August 2018 and July 2020. Patients selected for the study were HIV positive and attending a routine visit at either clinic. They also had to understand any of the three languages in which the assessment had been designed: English, Spanish, or Haitian Creole. Patients were presented with the tablet device in the waiting room with a brief explanation of how to use it and the purpose of the PRO assessment. The PRO questions differed slightly between the two clinics and were primarily designed to provide critical information about such issues as patients’ adherence to their HIV medications; smoking, alcohol and substance use; intimate partner violence; housing and living conditions and, importantly, possible healthcare issues such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. That’s a lot of information, and if the assessment were in a traditional paper format it would be daunting for any patient to engage with and for the clinicians to interpret.

This is where the use of an electronic tablet format was a masterstroke. The assessment’s simple but thorough design and the tablet’s ease of use made it an engaging and interactive tool. Of the 1,813 eligible patients presented with the tablet while waiting for their clinic appointment, 90% agreed to participate. Reasons for not engaging with the assessment usually centred around literacy, language, or visual barriers – they couldn’t read or speak one of the assessment’s languages or didn’t have their glasses. Incredibly, all but two of the 1,632 patients who
The study team showed how and why a properly designed PRO assessment is highly valued. It improved clinicians’ awareness and monitoring of patient needs, behaviours, and health issues.

Behind the Research
Duncan Short, PhD

Research Objectives
The PROgress Study explored the added value of introducing patient reported outcomes (PROs) in routine HIV care, and implementation of best practice.

Detail
Bio
Dr Duncan Short is Director of Global Implementation Science at ViiV Healthcare.

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References


We bridge the gap between HIV research findings and everyday HIV clinical practice. [Online] viivhealthcare.com/ending-hiv/hiv-implementationscience/ [Accessed 26 July 2022]

Personal Response
What do you hope the impact of your research will be?

The focus of HIV clinical care has firmly shifted beyond viral suppression. Treatment outcome targets now also include positive patient wellbeing and health-related quality of life. This study has shown how a well-implemented PRO assessment process before the patient and the healthcare provider meet can play an important part in helping providers understand the individuals they care for and therefore meet their evolving needs. The study and our implementation toolkit will hopefully help those wanting to introduce PROs into their practice to take that first step to improving patient care.