

Breakout Session: Opportunities and innovations in rural HIV health service provision

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What can be done to increase access to HIV care in rural communities?

Greater access to physicians who have training in the management and treatment of HIV in rural communities is needed, particularly as the turnover rate of general practitioners (GP's) in these communities continues to rise. These trained physicians could be specialists or GP's with specific training in HIV care. Training may involve online modules, formalized training (i.e. courses), bi-annual update seminars/workshops at an HIV center (e.g. St. Paul's Hospital), as well as direct training by experts in the field through preceptorship programs. It is also important that during these processes, physicians learn about the unique needs of the specific rural community in which will be working, and how to best address these needs in a culturally appropriate way.

Within the context of HIV education for physicians, it is essential that physicians not only gain an understanding of the biological nature of HIV, but also recognize the importance of personalized care and peer-to-peer support for their patients.

Potential strategies to increase access to HIV care in rural communities may include:

1. **Digital technologies:** key technologies and innovations such as Doc-in-a-box (currently used in Saskatchewan), iPads, and point-of-care viral load testing have helped move physician HIV medical education and HIV care forward in rural settings; such digital technologies could produce similar results in other rural settings
2. **Linkages:** by linking community pharmacies with HIV testing and education, it may be possible to reach a larger population in rural communities
3. **“Pop-up” clinics:** due to transportation barriers, “pop-up” clinics that provide HIV testing can provide a more accessible means to HIV-related care services
4. **Education:** public health nurses that educate the community on HIV testing and prevention could heighten awareness and utilization of HIV-related care services