Options/Opciones Project
Clinician-Initiated Prevention
Intervention for HIV Positives

Center for Health, Intervention, and Prevention (CHIP)
University of Connecticut

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Principal Investigators: Jeffrey Fisher, Ph.D. and Deborah Comman, Ph.D. both Principal Investigators at CHIP developed Options/Opciones, a clinic-initiated intervention, to reduce HIV transmission risk sexual behavior of HIV+ patients. William Fisher of the University of Western Ontario, Rivet Amico of CHIP and Angela Bryan of the University of Colorado were also involved in the research. The research was among the first of its kind to demonstrate the effectiveness of a clinician-initiated HIV prevention intervention for HIV+ persons, delivered during routine clinical care, in reducing risky sexual behavior among HIV+ patients.

The Options/Opciones intervention is an IMB model based, clinician-initiated HIV risk reduction intervention for HIV+ persons in clinical care. It is delivered using Motivational Interviewing techniques.

The Bottom-line: Clinician-initiated HIV prevention interventions targeting HIV+ persons, who are the source of new HIV infections, can effectively and feasibly be delivered in the course of routine HIV clinical care.

Review of the Original Research Study: The two hospitals comprising the largest HIV care providers in Connecticut served as the intervention and control sites.

- Participants included 497 HIV+ patients 18 years of age and older
- 23% reported engaging in unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex 3 months or less prior to the study for a total of 2408 unprotected sexual events with 351 HIV+, HIV- or status unknown partners.
- The Options/Opciones intervention significantly reduced HIV+ patients’ HIV transmission sexual behavior risk over a follow-up period of 18 months.

Why is it important to design clinician-based intervention for HIV+ patients?
Since all new HIV infections begin with an HIV+ person it is logical to focus efforts on HIV+ patients to prevent the further transmission of HIV. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have designated prevention for HIV+ individuals as a priority. (CDC 2003, Desquilbet et al 2002, NIH 1997, Valdisseri 2003). The CDC made the specific recommendation that HIV prevention be integrated into routine HIV clinical care for HIV+ patients stating, “Clinicians providing medical care to HIV+ persons can play a key role in helping their patients reduce risk behaviors and maintain safer practices and can do so with a feasible level of effort, even in constrained practice settings. Clinicians can greatly affect patients’ risks for transmission of HIV to others by performing a brief screening for HIV transmission risk behaviors; communicating prevention messages; discussing sexual and drug-use behavior; referring patients for such services as substance abuse treatment; facilitating partner notification, counseling and testing; and identifying and treating other STDs.” (CDC 2003)

The Options/Opciones Intervention: The Options/Opciones intervention is an IMB model-based, clinician-initiates HIV risk reduction intervention for HIV+ persons in clinical care using motivational interviewing techniques. Clinicians work collaboratively with their HIV+ patients to verbally assess patient risk behaviors, evaluate patients’ readiness to practice safer behaviors, strategize steps for reducing of eliminating risk behaviors, and prescribe an agreed-upon-goal to be reached at the next visit. Options/Opciones is implemented during every regular clinical care visit.

If you are interested in reading the original research study, please write to the Center for Health, Intervention, and Prevention c/o Jeffrey Fisher, Ph.D., Unit 1248, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut 06269-1248 or email Jeffrey.fisher@uconn.edu
What behavior change can you expect when you implement the Options/Opciones intervention?  
(Based on study results)
You can expect a reduction in the number of unprotected sexual events that last over time. At baseline 23% of the 497 HIV+ participants reported engaging in unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex over the past three months for a total of 2408 unprotected sexual events with 351 different partners. HIV+ patients in the intervention condition reported an average of 21.94 unprotected sexual risk events at baseline and an average of 2.7 unprotected sexual risk events at 18 month follow-up.

Fidelity in Implementing the Options/Opciones components: The clinician-initiate HIV prevention intervention employed was brief (5-10 minutes) and was delivered in 73% of all routine HIV clinical visits.

Core components of the Intervention:
The Theory: The IMB Model (Figure 1) is the theoretical framework for the Options/ Opciones Intervention. According to the model, patient’s HIV risk behaviors are driven by deficits in HIV prevention information, motivation and behavioral skills. In order to facilitate preventive behaviors, the physician-patient interaction must help patients to remEDIATE these deficits.

What do you have to “keep-in” to achieve the expected results?

Intervention steps: The following intervention steps take place during regularly scheduled clinical care visits and involve collaborative discussions between the clinician and the HIV+ patient. The additional time the intervention adds to the visit is typically between 5 to 10 minutes.

- Step 1: Clinician assessment of patient’s risk behavior
- Step 2: select a maximum of two risk behaviors to focus on further
- Step 3: Identify the conditions under which the behaviors take place
- Step 4: Patient and clinician select one of the two previously identified risk behaviors for the patient to rate according to the importance the patient places in changing the behavior and the confidence he/she has in actually making the change
- Step 5: Patient rates importance of changing behavior
- Step 6: Patient rates self-confidence in changing behavior.
- Step 7: Clinician Elicits strategies from patients for changing behavior
- Step 8: Clinician and patient negotiate a plan of action to be accomplished by the following visit
- Step 9: clinician writes goal on prescription pad and hands it to patient

Clinician training: Training the clinicians is critical to the successful implementation of the Options intervention. Clinicians can participate in the online Options training at http://optionstraining.chip.uconn.edu. The training provides clinicians with the opportunity to learn effective methods of HIV risk-reduction counseling, practice those methods online, and then apply them in clinical practice. The Options training includes multimedia lectures from leading infectious disease doctors, interactive role-plays with standardized HIV+ patients, and patient vignettes.

Getting the Options Package:
Options training manuals and patient education materials are available online at http://www.chip.uconn.edu/nt_res_options.htm.

For more information on Options, contact Deborah Comman, Ph.D. at 860-486-4645 or Deborah.comman@uconn.edu.


Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2003): Incorporating HIV prevention into the medical care of persons living with HIV: Recommendation of CDC, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the HIV Medicine Association of the Infectious Disease Society of America, MMWR, 52, RR-12, 1-26

