The Experiences of Newly Diagnosed Men Who Have Sex with Men Entering the HIV Care Cascade in Lima, Peru, 2015-2016: A Qualitative Analysis of Counselor-Participant Text Message Exchanges (Article)

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Mobile phone technology (mHealth) is a promising tool that has been used to improve HIV care in high-risk populations worldwide. Understanding patient perspectives of newly diagnosed men who have sex with men (MSM) in Lima, Peru during linkage and engagement in the HIV care continuum can help close the gaps in care following initial HIV diagnosis and ensure retention in continuous care. From June 2015 to March 2016, as part of a randomized controlled trial, 40 MSM participants were linked to care with an mHealth intervention within 3 months of HIV diagnosis at Via Libre clinic. For 12 weeks, participants agreed to receive weekly predetermined, standardized short message service (SMS), WhatsApp, and/or Facebook messages from an assigned HIV counselor. Text messaging was bi-directional, meaning participants could also send messages to their counselor at any time. In this qualitative study, we coded and thematically analyzed 947 SMS, 918 WhatsApp, and 2,694 Facebook bi-directional messages. Mean age of participants was 29.8 years (20-50); with 70 percent reporting some post-high school education and 73 percent self-identifying as homosexual. We identified six recurring themes that emerged from the data: (a) mental health symptoms; (b)
coping behaviors; (c) interpersonal support; (d) physical symptoms; (e) HIV knowledge; and (f) care coordination. Participants sent text messages describing depressive symptoms and seeking mental health services during this initial stage of HIV care. For newly diagnosed MSM entering the HIV care continuum, a bi-directional mHealth intervention provided support to facilitate care while eliciting deeply personal mental and emotional states. Future interventions could benefit from using mHealth interventions as ancillary support for clinicians. © Copyright 2017, Mary Ann Liebert, Inc. 2017.

Author keywords

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