

## **DUO PROJECT: Relationship Factors and HIV Treatment Adherence**

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### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The purpose of this study is to investigate, through qualitative and quantitative methods, the relationship factors that are associated with adherence to ART. The study will be conducted in 3 phases. Based on recruitment feasibility and the epidemiology of the HIV epidemic in the San Francisco area, we will include HIV+ seroconcordant and serodiscordant male couples.

#### *Phase 1:*

We conducted a qualitative investigation of relationship dynamics and partner tactics related to adherence.

#### *Phase 2:*

Will be the development of a medication adherence-specific measure of partner support, and will include specific tactics informed by Phase 1.

#### *Phase 3:*

Will be a cross-sectional study of 300 couples which will:

- 1) Validate the adherence specific measure of partner support constructed in Phase II
- 2) Test specific hypotheses of the inter-relationships among individual variables (e.g., quality of life, psychological well being, substance use) and couple-level variables (e.g., relationship satisfaction, conflict, adherence specific partner support), and ART adherence and clinical variables. Adherence to ART will be measured by 2 validated self-report measures. Clinical status will be assessed by viral load and CD4 count.

All phases will be guided by social control theory and findings will have clinical implications for the development of interventions to improve adherence within couples and theoretical implications for understanding the role of social control in HIV treatment adherence.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

Being in a primary relationship is believed to result in logistic and emotional support that provides health-promoting benefits. However, in a recent report of adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART) among a large diverse sample of adults living with HIV, a counterintuitive association was detected in two separate samples between being in a primary relationship and worse adherence to medications. Such findings raise the question of how relationship dynamics impact adherence to HIV treatment. This study proposes to add to the understanding of how couples interact around HIV medication in order to ultimately develop couples-based adherence interventions.

### **RESULTS**

The 40 qualitative interviews conducted in Phase 1 have been coded and are currently being analyzed. Thematic areas of interest related to the study question were organized around five domains: the frequency of engaging in medication adherence strategies (e.g. reminding, nagging, monitoring), affective response from the partner at the receiving end of those strategies, partner involvement in general health behaviors, partner involvement in HIV treatment decision-making, and partner involvement in specific medication-related activities.

**PROJECT RECRUITMENT DATES:** We are currently conducting recruitment for Phase 2. We expect recruitment to remain open for Phase 2 until April 30, 2008. Phase 3 recruitment is scheduled to begin in September 2008.

**PROJECT END DATE:** May 2010