

Evaluating Stigma

Use the following checklist to cover key themes related to stigma and to evaluate the effect of stigma or unfair treatment on treatment success.

- What goals do you have for our appointment today? Are there specific questions or issues you are facing that you would like to talk about?**

- Do family members or friends know about your HIV status? Am I, your physician, the only one who knows your HIV status?**

- How did you feel when initially diagnosed?**
 - Did you feel ashamed or different from others?
 - Did you feel that others blamed you for your HIV status?

- Did you have any fear or concern of being negatively perceived by others following disclosure of your HIV status?**
 - Have you been concerned that your family would reject you or that you would lose friends?
 - Have you feared you would lose your job?
 - Have you been concerned that people would avoid you?

- Are you currently facing stigma? If so, how does it affect your daily life?**

- When, where and how do you take your medication daily and does stigma affect your adherence to those medications?**
 - Have you avoided receiving treatment in the past?
 - Do you hide your medication?
 - Do you pick up your medication at the pharmacy yourself?
 - Do you take your medication at work?
 - Do you ever skip your medication in order to pre-empt side effects in social situations?

- Do you have access to a support network whether it is personal or professional?**

Confronting Stigma

Use the following checklist of key areas to enable patients to address HIV stigma in their lives.

- To facilitate a stigma-free environment, deliver comprehensive HIV information in a safe, easily understood manner.**

- Provide your patients with the basics of HIV education. Be sure to cover the following:**
 - Methods and risks of HIV transmission as well as protective measures
 - Risky behaviors that may make patients more vulnerable to spreading HIV
 - Treatment options, including the importance of finding an ideal treatment regimen that meets the needs of the individual patient
 - The importance of treatment adherence and methods to encourage medication-taking routines. The role of treatment resistance is also an important discussion
 - Understanding their numbers, including CD4 count and HIV viral load. The more informed patients are the more in control of their condition they will feel.

- Direct patients to services that support the well-being of those living with HIV.**

- Emphasize to your patients that HIV can be a chronic, manageable disease. They have done nothing wrong and should not feel ashamed of, or apologetic for, their HIV status.**

- Encourage your patients to avoid isolation due to their HIV status and fear of others' responses, as this can result in potentially harmful effects on their well-being**
 - If your patients are unable to discuss their status with family, friends or loved ones, refer them to organized support groups available in the HIV community, many of which offer online support forums.

- Remind patients of their rights:**
 - People living with HIV can be selective about who they choose to disclose their status to.
 - Health care providers who receive federal funding are not allowed to discriminate or withhold care based on HIV status.
 - People living with HIV have the right to enjoy the provision of goods and services regardless of their HIV status, such as finding housing or visiting shops, restaurants and hotels.
 - People living with HIV have the right to be informed about treatment options when their current treatment is no longer working or is affecting their daily lives through side effects.

☐ Prominently display, and make otherwise available, information in your clinic about patient rights and resources to turn to if patients feel they have experienced discrimination or if their rights have been violated. Specifically communicate these resources to patients regularly.

- Provide information about local organizations and AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) that can provide counseling and legal services.
- People living with HIV can file a complaint through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) if they feel they are being discriminated against by a state or local government or a public organization.

☐ Ensure your staff is knowledgeable about patient rights. Train your employees on patient rights and their role, as health care workers, in empowering patients and on how to direct patients to additional services.