

Sharing Medical Adherence Responsibilities Together: An Approach for Promoting Responsibility and Solidarity in Human Immunodeficiency Virus Serodiscordant Couples

Dear Editor,

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) serodiscordant relationship refers to mixed-status and condition in which one of the partners is HIV positive, while the other is HIV negative. It is anticipated that 75% and 37% of serodiscordant couples are living in countries with low and high HIV prevalence, respectively. They play a significant role in preserving the global HIV epidemic through sexual contacts.^[1] There is a strong tendency towards conducting studies on HIV prevention that address couples as a unit for changing behaviors and interventions.^[2,3] There are two general strategies of service delivery in serodiscordant couples, including biobehavioral and biomedical categories, with emphasis on couple-based strategies.^[3] SMART Couples, which stands for Sharing Medical Adherence Responsibilities Together, is a biobehavioral and couple-based approach for discordant couples with inadequate medication adherence in the HIV-positive partner. This approach educates couples about the significance of compliance to reduce viral resistance. The intervention involves cognitive-behavioral elements to identify barriers, promote healthy behaviors, and employing problem-solving techniques to identify and address adherence barriers.^[4] Training on the importance of adherence to prevent viral resistance, health maintenance, recognition of non-adherence patterns, and increasing mutual social support for good health outcomes are core components of it. SMART Couples sessions for partners are better provided by a certified social worker or therapist, HIV case manager, health educator, or a nurse with experience of dealing with a dyad couple.^[4,5]

The couple-based approaches in the service delivery process that emphasize healthy lifestyles, behavioral changes, and mutual supports can have positive consequences for the individual, newborn, family, and community. These approaches provide a context for couples to recognize their mutual responsibility to protect each other from transmitting HIV and to maintain each other's health. It also creates a safe environment to discuss sensitive issues such as sexual relationships using negotiation skills. It should be noted that for the effective implementation of couple-based approaches in real-world contexts, a cultural shift from focusing on individuals to dyad couples is needed, as well as the emphasis on addressing existing organizational and financial barriers.

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Conflicts of Interest

Nothing to declare.

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