SPLASH program seeks to reduce HIV transmission among HIV-positive persons

UCSD, Owen Clinic gathering data on effectiveness of implementing behavioral intervention into primary care in urban areas

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In the past, HIV-prevention programs focused on preventing the virus among HIV-negative persons. The messages were straightforward: “Use a condom to reduce your chances of getting HIV or AIDS,” “Don’t share needles,” or “Get tested.”

But seldom did these prevention campaigns target HIV-positive persons, even though one HIV-positive person is involved in any new case of HIV.

Today, prevention programs are beginning to change and studies are giving more attention to people living with HIV. This new approach is called prevention with positives.

One such program in San Diego is the Supporting Positive Living and Sexual Health (SPLASH) project, a prevention project designed to reduce HIV transmission risk behaviors among persons living with HIV.

A collaboration between the University of California, San Diego’s Owen Clinic and the Division of Community Pediatrics, the SPLASH project’s main purpose is to combine a brief provider intervention with intense counseling sessions in order to reduce the risk of HIV transmission from HIV-positive patients to their sexual partners,” according to Estela Blanco, a research assistant for the evaluation team of the project.

In addition to providing primary care, the Owen Clinic also offers services such as mental health, and drug and alcohol counseling.

SPLASH consists of two main components: brief provider interventions and one-on-one interventions.

The brief provider intervention involves a short message a doctor gives to their patient about reducing their risk of transmitting the virus to others and/or becoming re-infected with the virus.

Blanco gave two examples of a message a doctor may give to his or her patients: “Unprotected sex may expose you to other sexually transmitted diseases or other strains of HIV. If you don’t use a latex condom when you have sex, you risk infecting your partner.”

Or, “I believe it is important for you to tell the people you have sex with that you have HIV. When you don’t share this information, you may feel guilty and lose his/her trust.”

Patients receive a brief provider interven-