

# Our+Care OC

A newsletter created by HIV-positive individuals for people living with HIV



## When was the last time you went to see your doctor? When is your next appointment?

Do you know how often you are supposed to see your doctor? Once a year? Once a month? A recent guideline from the HIV/AIDS Bureau indicates that all individuals living with HIV should see their doctor **at least once every six months**. Based on your health and/or your health care provider, you may see your doctor more often. If you see your doctor often, your doctor is more likely to prescribe you anti-retroviral medication, to help suppress your viral load and help improve your overall health.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning August 2014, the Orange County Health Care Agency is starting a campaign to make sure that persons living with HIV disease (PLWHD) see their doctor. Currently, 83% of HIV-positive clients in Ryan White-funded medical care (17<sup>th</sup> Street Care or Laguna Beach Community Clinic) are seeing their doctor regularly. However, when we look

at HIV-positive clients in all of Orange County, only 60% of clients are in continuous (regular) HIV medical care.<sup>2</sup> Orange County's goal is to increase the percent of all PLWHD patients who are in regular HIV care to 72% by 2015. This goal is in line with the National HIV/AIDS Strategy to increase access to care and improve health for people living with HIV. The table below shows the percent of PLWHD in regular HIV care compared to the 2015 goal.

| In Medical Care <sup>3</sup> | Ryan White | All OC           |
|------------------------------|------------|------------------|
| 2010                         | 79%        | N/A <sup>4</sup> |
| 2013                         | 83%        | 60%              |
| 2015 (Goal)                  | 84%        | 72%              |

Individuals receiving Ryan White medical care are more likely to see their doctor regularly. With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), over half of the PLWHD that previously received Ryan White medical care will be eligible to receive non-Ryan White medical care (i.e., Medi-

Cal/CalOptima, Private Insurance). Regardless of the type of insurance an individual has, all PLWHD should be able to go to their doctor regularly. Therefore, the next time you see your case manager, mental health service provider, food bank provider, or other service provider, **they should be asking when you last saw your doctor**. Tell them when it was and if there is anything you need help addressing.

## "But I feel fine; do I need to see my doctor every six months?"

**Yes.** Although you are *feeling healthy, it is important* to check in with your doctor at a minimum of every six months so you can:

- monitor any changes in your health
- get your medications
- review your CD4 and Viral Load (VL)

## Orange County Goal:

**By 2015, 72% of individuals living with HIV/AIDS will see their doctor at least once every six months.**

<sup>2</sup> Continuous care is defined as having at least two medical visits, at least three months apart, in a 12-month period.

<sup>3</sup> OC HIV Case Registry as of December 2013

<sup>4</sup> Baseline data for all PLWHD in 2010 is not comparable to 2013 midpoint or 2015 goal.

<sup>1</sup> Cheever, Laura W., & Doshi, Rupali K., HIV Care Retention and the Goal of an AIDS-Free Generation. Medscape. Retrieved from: [www.medscape.com/viewarticle/778617](http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/778617)

## Find the right doctor for you!

The implementation of the ACA increased access to health insurance coverage for PLWHD. You have the option to choose an HIV doctor you feel most comfortable with based on your insurance. Make sure you find the right doctor; this will make the visit to the doctors more enjoyable. Recommendations to find the right doctor:

- Choose someone who knows about HIV
- Pick a doctor that makes you feel welcomed
- Find a doctor you can get to easily

## Do not miss your appointments!

It is important you make it to your doctor's appointments. If you miss your appointment, you may not be able to reschedule your appointment for many weeks. If you find it difficult to make it to your appointments, talk to your case manager. They can help address issues to help you to see your doctor. Depending on your situation, you may be eligible to get Ryan White services to help you get to HIV medical care visits.

## Ask questions!

Your well-being is very important. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Asking questions help you better understand your care and help your doctor know your concerns.

Questions you can ask your doctor:

- Do you welcome HIV-positive patients?
- What are my numbers (CD4/VL)?
- How do I disclose my status?
- What can I expect from the treatment and medications?
- How often should I have labs drawn?
- What do I get screened for?
- What happens if I miss a dose of my medication?

## Be an ADVOCATE!

If you are already visiting your doctor regularly, be an advocate by letting others know about the importance of seeing their doctor at least once every six

months. We know 83% of Ryan White clients and 60% of all PLWHD in Orange County are in regular HIV medical care. However, there are still people that are not in care and you can make a change by telling others how seeing your doctor regularly helped you. You can also join a speaker's bureau, promote HIV testing, or volunteer at an agency. PLWHD needs your help to have access to quality care.

### Visit:

<http://ochealthinfo.com/phs/about/dcepi/hiv/libehiv>  
for more information.

### My Doctor is the Best Because:

"He lets me know the reality of my situation. He fits me in when I need something urgent."

- **Corey, positive for 9 years**

"She cares, she's my reg Dr. & my HIV Specialist, she'll always see me when I need to see her."

- **Wes, positive for 29 years**

"He seems to me to be concerned about my health and goes above and beyond to make sure I get the care I need."

- **John, positive for 7 years**

"She fight to keep in my best of health and just about my wellbeing and tries to get what I need with referrals and appointments that are hard to get."

- **Kelly, positive for 27 years**

"Dentist ... is very respectful to me and is very good."

- **Kelly, positive for 27 years**

"He is very knowledgeable about my HIV."

- **Gilbert, positive for 25 years**

## ORANGE COUNTY HIV QUALITY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Our+Care OC is a project of the Orange County HIV Quality Management Committee and HIV Consumer Advocacy Committee. The HIV Quality Management Committee works to increase the quality of Ryan White services. For more information about the committee, please call (714) 834-8063. If you have feedback or suggestions for future newsletters, please contact **Mindy He** at [MHe@ochca.com](mailto:MHe@ochca.com).

