

# FOR PATIENT CENTERED PRIMARY CARE...

## *Partner with Your Patients*

*This series shares case studies on how primary care practices are engaging patients in improving the practice.*

**Urban Horizons Family Health Center**, Is a small family practice within The Institute for Family Health Network located in South Bronx serving a low-income population with complex medical and social needs with approximately 175 of those patients living with HIV. Comprehensive Outpatient Medical Practice and Support Services (COMPASS), a collection of HIV treatment and prevention programs spread across a network of health centers, is housed within this practice. With the statewide initiative targeting HIV, Hepatitis B, and harm reduction, the importance of the role of peer educators, defined here as people with lived experience with HIV, was highlighted and has since been incorporated within the health center.

### What was the issue?

While HIV is typically treated within specialty clinics, having COMPASS services increases the health center's capability to care for patients living with this condition. With this condition, issues such as stigma and unrepressed viral load are more of a concern and require sensitivity when being addressed.

### How did they engage their patients?

Their peer educator, Elizabeth Lopez, is critical in being able to engage and connect with this hard to reach population. While Lopez is able to individually work with patients during medical or home visits to provide meaningful support and connections to needed resources, Lopez also helps coordinate the consumer advisory board (CAB) which meets quarterly and serves as the most structured venues for patients to voice their concerns and inform clinic operations. Because of the rapport and trust that patients have built with peer education, members of the consumer advisory board are largely self-selected and help set the agenda to guide the direction of upcoming meetings.

#### PRACTICE PROFILE

**Name:** Urban Horizons Family Health Center, South Bronx, NY **Practice Type:** Urban site

**PCHM Recognition:** Level 3 **Primary Care Provider Staffing:** 5 providers (2 MD, 1 DO, 1 NP, 1 PA)

**Patient Demographics:** 7.37% uninsured, 5.82% Medicare, 44/32% Medicaid

**Patient Visits/Year:** 20,500 **Level of Engagement:** Organizational Design

**Notable Highlight:** Use of peer educators to connect with patients improves intake and scheduling

## What was the result?

A QI project addressing the issue of unrepressed viral load involved concentrated outreach for those patients. The outreach was originally scheduled based on staff availability so patients would get multiple calls from different staff. When presented to the advisory board, patients advised against this and suggested building the intervention around continuity rather than staff availability. During another advisory board meeting, patients voiced concern over the intake process. Many patients chose to receive HIV care in a family medicine clinic rather than specialty clinic to escape stigma associated with the condition. Rather than have COMPASS staff call patients from the waiting room, CAB members suggested they call patients when they were already in the back to protect confidentiality.

The incorporation of the feedback given by the CAB has resulted in improved workflow and patient satisfaction. This practice sees engaging patients more than just a way to improve their organization; it is a way to improve and meet the needs of the community it serves.

## What advice do they have for others?

Having seen the positive impact that their peer educators have on their patients in health outcomes, social support, and overall well-being, this practice recommends investing in peer educations as an incredible intervention to build patient engagement. However, simply bringing in a peer educator on is not enough; choosing a peer educator that is committed to patients and has shared experiences is just as important.

### How can I learn more?

Visit the [Institute for Family Health website](#)

Visit the UCSF Center for Excellence in Primary Care [Patient Engagement page](#)

**Other resources:** [Institute for Patient and Family Centered Care](#)

**Thanks for the case study to:** Elizabeth Lopez, Peer Educator; Rebecca Green, LMSW, Regional Director of COMPASS, Sarah Nosal, MD, Medical Director of Urban Horizons FHC



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