

Study uses novel incentive to encourage HIV patient care and treatment

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In a new study by ICAP at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health, researchers are assessing a novel approach to encourage newly diagnosed HIV positive people to seek care and adhere to HIV treatment. The unique study in the HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN) gives people who test HIV positive a coupon for a gift card to claim after they complete clinic visits and laboratory tests. Patients who adhere to HIV treatment regularly can decrease the amount of HIV in their blood, leading to viral suppression. Study participants who achieve viral suppression also receive gift cards as a reward and motivation for a maximum of four times a year.

Dr. Wafaa El-Sadr, ICAP director, is protocol chair for the HPTN 065 or Test Link to Care Plus Treat (TLC-Plus) Study. HPTN 065 is being conducted in the Bronx and in Washington, DC and involves 37 HIV testing sites and 39 HIV care sites in the two communities. HPTN 065 aims to determine the feasibility of enhanced testing, linkage and treatment as a strategy for HIV prevention in the U.S.

Community input played an important role in the design of the study, explained Dr. El-Sadr, who is also professor of Epidemiology and Medicine at Columbia's Mailman School. "Before we introduced our financial incentive, we had to think so carefully about what can happen that's good and what can undermine what you're trying to do," she said. "And we want to use incentives that, if they are effective, will be cost-effective for health systems."

Findings of the study are featured in *Science* magazine's July 13 special issue, "HIV/AIDS in America," published on the eve of the International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2012) in Washington, D.C.

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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