REACH: a mixed-methods study to investigate the measurement, prediction and improvement of retention and engagement in outpatient HIV care

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Medication for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is highly effective but lifelong. People living with HIV need to take their medication regularly and have their health monitored at a specialist HIV clinic. This is vital for their health, and reduces the possible transmission of HIV and cost of missed appointments to the NHS.

We looked at patient data collected over 12 years from HIV clinics across the UK to examine the consequences of not keeping up appointments at the HIV clinic. This showed that people who attend the clinic on a regular basis have a healthier immune system and are likely to live longer.

We conducted a survey among 983 people living with HIV in London, organised interviews and focus groups, and interviewed health-care professionals. Patients were generally satisfied with their HIV care. People who were younger, had been diagnosed for longer, had children or had drug issues tended to have greater difficulties with attendance. We developed a formula that clinics can use to identify people who may find it difficult to keep up their appointments in the future, so that clinic staff can intervene to help them.

The stigma associated with HIV has a strong negative impact on attendance and our study suggests a need to manage the complex psychological, social and economic issues which stop people attending their appointments at the clinic. Our findings support holistic, multidisciplinary approaches to care, including peer support from other people living with HIV. Clinics held in alternative locations may help those who are afraid to be seen at the HIV clinic.
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