AETC-NMC
AIDS Education and Training Center
National Multicultural Center
HOWARD UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Case Study Adapted from Addressing HIV Care and Health Literacy

Jerome is a 30-year-old Hispanic man who has presented at his dentist's office with a complaint of "a sore on the roof of my mouth." Dr. Perez has been Jerome's dentist for for the past four years. On initial examination, she sees a lesion on the hard palate that looks like a bruise the size of a pea. Without any further investigation or examination she explains her finding to Jerome by saying, "What you have on the roof of your mouth is a sore that could indicate that you have a kind of cancer called Kaposi's sarcoma. Have you ever heard of Kaposi's sarcoma?"

Jerome looks stunned and says, "Isn't that the kind of cancer gay guys get when they have HIV?" Dr. Perez answers, "It is often associated with HIV infection. It sounds like you know something about HIV. Do you know anyone with HIV or this kind of cancer? – Do you think you are HIV positive"

Discussion Questions:

1. How was health literacy taken into account in the way that Dr. Perez described the lesion?
2. What do you think Dr. Perez is trying to achieve with this line of questioning? Would you approach Jerome in a different manner? If so, how? How would you approach health literacy issues?
3. What do you know about the Hispanic concept of machismo? If Jerome is influenced by machismo, how do you think it would affect his health literacy and his ability to understand a diagnosis of HIV? Do you think Dr. Perez is taking this—and other cultural factors—into consideration as she progresses in the discussion?
4. What do you think would be the best way to continue this conversation with Jerome? Would you consider offering him a chance to talk to a male provider? What kind of materials or referrals would be appropriate?
5. Based on the case study discussion, what strategies to address health literacy might you include in an action plan for Jerome's care?
6. What ethical responsibility does Dr. Perez have to the patient?
7. Should Dr. Perez have made an effort to exclude other possible lesions that could be present first that are not associated with HIV, before explaining her findings to the patient? Why or why not?
8. Discuss other Cultural Competence issues that may impact retention into care and treatment