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

Maria is a 32-year-old Hispanic woman who reports to a rural clinic for her HIV test results. Maria's primary language is Spanish, and she does not speak or read English. During the initial appointment, Maria met with Melissa, an HIV counselor, and Ana, the only certified interpreter at the clinic. When Melissa scheduled a follow-up appointment for Maria for this week, she knew that Ana was starting maternity leave and would not be available when Maria returned for her HIV test result. After much discussion, Maria, Melissa, and Ana decided that Maria would bring her 17 year old sister, Cristina, to the follow-up appointment to translate and to help with communication. Maria identified Cristina as a "safe and supportive" person and stated that "her English is pretty good."

During the follow-up appointment, Melissa shares the HIV test results with both Maria and Cristina. As Melissa informs Cristina that her sister has tested positive for HIV, Cristina begins to cry. She translates the results to Maria, who also begins to cry.

Discussion Questions

1. What health literacy issues arise when working with a client who does not speak or read English?
2. What are the issues related to having a client's family member serve as an interpreter? Is it ever appropriate? If so, how should the age, gender, and health literacy of family members be taken into consideration?
3. Would the issue of having a client's family member serve as an interpreter be relevant if the results of the test were negative? Why or why not?
4. How can Melissa best manage the immediate situation, given the language barrier with Maria?
5. If placed in a similar situation and lacking a certified interpreter, what are some options for overcoming language barriers in a culturally sensitive manner? What resources are available in your care setting?
6. Based on the case study discussion, what strategies to address health literacy might you include in an action plan for Maria's care?
7. Discuss other Cultural Competence issues that may impact retention into care and treatment