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Case Management News and Notes

Some people have asked recently: "How often should I hear from my Case Manager?"

How often a Case Manager is required to contact a client changes according to the severity of the issues a client may be facing at any given time. The term Case Managers use to describe the severity of issues is "Acuity." We get this term from our funders, the state of Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program.

If a client has relatively good support - for example, the client has stable housing, has a doctor, has a way to pay for medical care, is in stable health, and has good social support - that client is determined to be an "Acuity Level 1." The state requires Case Managers to contact an Acuity Level 1 client once a quarter. That's once every three (3) months. Of course, the client can call their Case Manager as much as they need; the contact requirement only means that if a Case Manager hasn't heard from an Acuity Level 1 client for a couple of months, that Case Manager is going to "reach out" by either a phone call or a letter, to make sure that the client is doing well and does not need additional assistance.

If a client has a number of difficult issues going on -- for example, the client does not have stable housing, has lost health insurance or benefits, is having active mental health or substance use problems, etc. - that client is determined to be an "Acuity Level 2" or if the situation is really bad, an "Acuity Level 3." The state requires Case Managers to contact an Acuity Level 2 or 3 client once a month. Again, the client can choose to contact the Case Manager as often as they need.

How do Case Managers determine who is "Acuity Level 1" and who is "Acuity Level 2" or "Acuity Level 3"? There is a very specific form, called the Wisconsin Acuity Assessment, that is provided to Case Managers by the state AIDS/HIV Program.

Some clients may remember when their Case Manager was required to call all clients once a month. The contact requirement changed in 2003 when the state AIDS/HIV Program revised the state standards for HIV Case Management. The reason the state changed the contact requirement was to recognize the changes to HIV Case Management since combination antiretroviral medications became available. Namely, more people are living longer with HIV/AIDS today than was true earlier in the epidemic. With more people living longer than ever before, more people are in need of Case Management. And the idea is that, with a Case Manager's help, a client should be able to address some concerns and get things "stable" after awhile. During the periods when things are "stable" for a client, their need for help from their Case Manager should decrease. If the client has a change in their situation at a later date - a new illness, a loss of housing, a loss of insurance, etc. - their need for help from their Case Manager would again increase.

"Acuity" helps your Case Manager better respond to the needs of a larger caseload.

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Remember - you can call your Case Manager as often as you need. The contact standard is just in place so that, if your Case Manager doesn't hear from you for awhile, they "reach out" to make sure all is well.

Staff Changes:

AIDS Network is very pleased to welcome Bethany Matson as Case Manager. Bethany fills the position vacated by the resignation of Narrissia "Risa" Harrison in May. Bethany started at AIDS Network in July. She has an extensive background in human service, most recently working at a group home operated by Goodwill Industries for individuals living with chronic and persistent mental illness.

AIDS Network is also very pleased to welcome Jesus Carbonell as Bilingual Case Manager. Jesus fills the position vacated by the resignation of Marco Torrez in August. Jesus started at AIDS Network in mid-August. He has an extensive background in HIV/AIDS services, including working previously as an HIV Case Manager in Miami, Florida.

After more than ten years on staff at AIDS Network, I have resigned my position as Director of Life Care Services, to go to work for the University of Wisconsin Medical Foundation. I started at AIDS Network in 1994 as a matched client support volunteer, giving clients rides to support groups, cleaning houses, and leading a support group. I joined paid staff in 1997, first as a Case Manager. From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank all the clients with whom I have had the privilege to work over the past ten years. I have learned more than I ever imagined I would learn - and I will miss you all deeply. Thank you.

-- Ann Fleming

Nutrition and HIV by Jody Epstein, Treatment Support Services Coordinator

Why does good nutrition matter for HIV+ People?

- Fighting HIV is hard work for your body and it requires extra food.
- HIV can infect your gut cells, making it harder for your body to absorb nutrients from food.
- HIV medications can change the way your body processes food.
- Good nutrition can help minimize side effects & help you get the most out of your meds.

How AIDS Network can help:

Nutrition Counseling: Sarah Mattison, a registered dietician, is available to meet clients one-on-one to provide nutrition information and counseling. Ask your case manager how you can meet with Sarah!

Treatment Support Services: Jody Epstein can help you make the most of your HIV treatment by providing information on medications and side effects, referrals to the Peer Support Program, adherence counseling, pillboxes, timers, and much more!

Eating well when you're not feeling well

It's hard to stick to a healthy diet when you feel sick. However, your immune system needs food to do its job. Here are some tips to help you keep up good food habits even during tough times:

**Keep healthy, easy foods on hand for when you're very tired, such as:*

Yogurt & cottage cheese, string cheese, P.B. and whole wheat bread, frozen veggies like carrots, peppers, green beans & celery, hard-boiled eggs, hummus and pita, canned tuna, canned beans and soups, deli slices of turkey, mixed nuts and dried fruit, protein-shakes.

*When you feel good, cook large portions of foods you can freeze, so you'll have healthy, easy-to-eat meals for your "down" days.

*Soft foods like oatmeal, lentil soup, baked beans, gravy, smooth nut butters, yogurt and cooked, mashed vegetables are gentle on a sore mouth or throat.

Get enough Protein

Protein is the part of food that you use to build cells in your body. Eating enough protein is important for keeping muscle mass and building the immune cells you need to survive. How much is enough? You should eat a serving protein at every meal (including breakfast).

Good protein foods:

Fish (salmon, cod, tuna, sardines), nuts and seeds (peanut butter, almonds, cashews, walnuts, sunflower & pumpkin seeds), meats (chicken, turkey, pork, beef), dairy (yogurt, cheese, milk, eggs), beans (chick peas, split peas, lentils, kidney, pinto, navy and black beans)

Special buying tip: A food-buying program called SHARE (www.sharewi.org) allows you to buy lots of protein foods for less money.

Eat Those Fruits & Veggies

Fruit and vegetables are packed with vitamin power and fiber. Vitamins are essential for many body functions, including fighting infection. You should eat:

*Dark green and orange vegetables (like carrots, spinach, squash, and kale), citrus fruit and berries have lots of vitamins and antioxidants.

*Eating enough fruits and veggies reduces your risk for heart disease and diabetes, major complications for HIV+ people.

*Whole fruit, like apples, oranges, mangoes, strawberries, peaches and plums, has fiber, unlike most juice. Fiber helps reduce cholesterol and keeps the bowels working well.

*Eating fruit for dessert is a healthy alternative to candy and pastries.

*There is no right way to eat veggies - experiment with cooking and seasoning until you find flavors that taste good to you!

Special buying tip: Farmer's Markets sell good vegetables cheaply. Just be sure to wash and cook food thoroughly before eating to avoid infections. www.reapfoodgroup.org/atlas/farmers_markets.htm

Vitamins, Minerals & Antioxidants

- Antioxidants are chemicals that protect your cells from damage and stress. Cells are stressed when they fight infections (like HIV), when you eat unhealthy foods (like trans fats) and just by living every day. Getting enough antioxidants has been shown to help people with HIV stay healthier.

- In addition to eating fruits and veggies, taking a multivitamin that has the following antioxidant ingredients is recommended for anyone with HIV: selenium, magnesium and zinc, vitamin C & vitamin E, B-vitamins and folic acid

FALL Support Group Meetings

Fourth Wednesday Drop-In HIV+ Support Group-

6-8 p.m. at AIDS Network's Madison office
September 26, October 24, November 28 (note: this is the week AFTER Thanksgiving)
This group welcomes anyone living with HIV/AIDS.

Rock County Drop-In HIV+ Support Group-

5:30-7:30 p.m. at the Rock County Job Center, 1900 Center Ave., Janesville
September 27, October 25, November 29
This group welcomes anyone living with HIV/AIDS.

Pozitive Light-

5:30-7:30 p.m. at AIDS Network's Madison office
September 14 and 28, October 12 and 26, November 9 and 23 (note: the 23rd is the day after Thanksgiving)
This group welcomes HIV+ men who have sex with men.

Substance Use Support Group (with Brett Brasher) -

4-5 p.m. at AIDS Network's Madison office
October 11, October 18, October 25 (note: no meeting October 4)
This group welcomes all HIV+ individuals with concerns about their past or present use of alcohol or other drugs.

Holiday Gift Drive

Greetings everyone!

I just wanted to let everyone know that we are starting to work on the Holiday Gift Project! We are extremely fortunate to have such great support in the Madison area to be able to make someone's holiday just a little brighter. We are in the beginning stages of the project, however I wanted to let everyone know to be on the watch for our letter for gift requests. It will be mailed out sometime in November.

As you are aware, we have a deadline on the form. If you can start to get ideas of gifts and have them ready for when the form is mailed, you can fill it out right away and send it back. Unfortunately if you miss the deadline, there is no guarantee that your request will be filled. We partner with a few outside supports that have to have the list by a certain day to better the chances of your request being filled.

Please feel free to contact Sarah McCoy, Case Manager Program Assistant at (608) 252-6540 ext 11, or Dan Leamy Case Manager at 252-6540 ext 44.

Prescription Drug Disposal

When: Saturday October 13, 2007, 9 a.m. until 1 p.m.

Where: City Transfer Station, 121 E. Olin Ave

This is a one day free drive-thru drop off for unwanted prescription and over-the-counter medication. At the event, you will drive through the drop off area and give medications to volunteer pharmacists, pharmacy students and hazardous waste experts. You won't be asked to provide your name.

Please keep your unused or expired medication in the original bottles. Use a permanent marker to cover your name and other personal information on the label but please do NOT cover up the name of the medication. All medications will be destroyed and properly handled to ensure patient confidentiality.

You will be asked a few short questions:

- What is your zip code?
- How did you learn about this event?
- What would you have done with these products for disposal?
- Was this location convenient and would you come back again?

You can get rid of:

- Prescription Medicine (pills, liquids and creams)
- Over-the-counter medicine (pills, liquids and creams)
- Medications for pets
- Vitamins
- Nebulizer solution
- Medication samples
- Inhalers
- Illegal drugs (illegal drugs will be taken, no questions asked. They will be turned over to proper authorities immediately for disposal)

DO NOT BRING:

- Needles/Sharps
- IV bags
- Oxygen tanks
- Nebulizer machines
- Thermometers

Additional information can be found at www.meddropdane.org

Welcome, Bethany!

Hello all. My name is Bethany Matson and I joined the AIDS Network in July, 2007 as a Case Manager. Prior to joining the AIDS Network family, I was a Resident Counselor at a Goodwill group home serving adults with severe and persistent mental illness. I have a B.A. in Sociology with an emphasis in Criminal Justice and a M.S. in Criminal Justice from Lakeland College. I am originally from Milwaukee and have lived in Madison for almost 4 years. Plus on September 9th, I celebrated my 25th birthday! Fun times indeed!

I already have big plans for my contributions to this organization. Currently I am working on starting a new HIV+ women's support group, specifically for African-American women, and hopefully I will get a chance to develop/collaborate on many other projects in the community to raise awareness and really get the AIDS Network name familiar with people, especially in the African-American community. Along with that I will be working with the clients I have on my case management load, so all that should keep me very busy. I know that for those clients who were placed on my case-load it has been a difficult transition, with losing two previous Case Managers so close together. However I ask all of you to bear with me and hopefully this will be a very good transition for all of us and the last change for a while!

Again, I am very excited to be a part of AIDS Network and working with the great people involved with the organization.

Dealing with Medical Debt

Medical bills are a reality for everyone. While medical debt can be complicated and overwhelming at times, it can also be a frustrating process when you cannot afford to pay. Given our imperfect health care system, medical debt is an issue that is not likely to go away soon. As a person living with HIV-related issues, you may have had a lot of practice dealing with frustrating situations involving medical debt. The key is not to ignore medical bills and to identify what you can do to solve the problem. When you are able to identify the problem and ask for help, you can make dealing with medical bills a bit less frustrating. If you ignore the problem the debt will continue to grow and it never goes away.

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Here is some helpful information about confronting medical debt:

What should I do when I receive a medical bill that I do not understand, disagree with or cannot pay?

1. Don't ignore the medical bill.
2. Call the hospital or clinic and ask to speak with the billing department.
3. Remember to be as nice as you can be, even if the person you are talking to is unpleasant. Keep your cool!
4. Tell them you received the bill, but you need help understanding it and/or you can't afford to pay it.
5. Ask them to double check that the amount you are being billed for is accurate and correct for the services you received (This is the time to determine whether or not a billing mistake has been made!).
6. Double check to make sure the medical provider has your correct insurance or benefits information, including Ryan White.
7. Tell them you are having financial problems and ask them to describe your options (Can I be put on a payment plan? Can the amount be lowered or eliminated based on my financial circumstances?).
8. Write down what the hospital or clinic tells you.
9. Read what you wrote back to the person on the phone. Make sure they agree with what you wrote down.
10. Follow through with any agreement or arrangements you have made. Try to get any agreements in writing if possible.

What should I do if I still cannot afford to pay my medical bill after talking to the hospital?

Call your Case Manager at AIDS Network (608.252.6540). Your Case Manager may be able to help you problem solve this situation. Financial matters are sensitive and most people don't like to talk about them. However, it can be helpful to talk to someone about any unpaid bill and take steps to resolve the problem. Unpaid medical bills do not just go away if you ignore them! Furthermore, the earlier you attempt to deal with your medical bills the better, including discussing your options with both the hospital and your Case Manager. This is because the amount of your medical debt can, and likely will, grow over time!

Why should I open medical bills when I already know I can't pay them?

It can sometimes be a challenge to confront medical debt, especially when you are trying to focus on your health. However, if you ignore a medical bill, you will pay more in the long run. The hospital may charge interest, collection fees, legal and other administrative fees before going to court. Once the hospital takes you to court, these fees can be added to the original amount. If the judge decides that the debt is valid, the bill may grow even more.

What will happen if I do nothing?

For any unpaid bill, if you do not maintain communication with the hospital, the hospital may eventually send the debt to a collection agency, and/or it may decide to sue you for the money.

If the debt is sent to a collection agency, the collection agency will take over for the hospital in attempting to get the money from you by sending you bills and calling you. If the collection agency is unsuccessful in collecting the money from you, it may return the debt to the medical provider for further action. Eventually, the medical provider may take you to court for this debt.

What happens if I am sued for my unpaid medical bills?

If you are sued by the hospital or medical provider for an unpaid medical bill, a judge will determine whether or not the bill is valid. If so, the judge will grant the hospital or medical provider a "judgment" against you, and will most likely add additional fees and costs to the total amount you owe. These additional amounts include service fees, filing fees, docketing fees and attorney fees. For example, if your original bill for medical services totaled \$1000, it would not be unusual for you to be required to pay back an additional several hundred dollars worth of pre-judgment interest, court fees, attorneys fees, and other miscellaneous costs, if a judgment is granted against you for your inability to pay this bill when it was initially due. Usually, the older the medical debt is, the larger the judgment amount.

How does a court judgment for an unpaid medical bill affect me?

§ Credit Score: A court judgment for an unpaid medical debt can affect your credit score. Your credit score matters when you apply for loans (for a car, house, etc.), credit cards and other payment plans in the future.

§ Garnishment: If you are employed, an entity holding a judgment against you for any unpaid medical debt can attempt to garnish your wages through the courts. Garnishment is when the hospital or other medical provider who is the owner of the judgment against you becomes authorized to deduct a certain amount from your paycheck on a regular basis until the debt is paid.

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§ Liens: If you own certain property (such as real estate or a vehicle), the owner of the judgment can attempt to place what is called a "lien" against your property, so that if you tried to sell your property, the proceeds of that sale would first go to pay off your debt judgment, prior to you receiving any money from the sale.

There are laws that limit a creditor's ability to garnish your income or place a lien on property based on the individual's finances and eligibility for public benefits. These laws may not stop a creditor from getting a judgment, but it limits their ability to force payment. Please contact AIDS Network Legal Services if you have questions.

What should I do if I already have a letter from a collection agency regarding a past due medical bill?

If you are able, you should contact the collection agency to learn your options. This is not always an easy task, as some collection agencies are "nicer" than others. Sometimes, collection agencies are authorized to set up payment plans, but sometimes they are not or are unwilling to accept the amount you may be able to pay. Under federal law, collection agencies must send you written verification of the debt at your request. It is a good idea to make your request in writing, and to keep a copy of your written request for your own records. Also, there are specific federal and state laws regulating the collection practices of these agencies, and what they can and cannot do to collect the debt. Contact your Case Manager at AIDS Network or Legal Services at 608.252.6540 for more information and questions.

This article does not constitute legal advice. Please contact AIDS Network Legal Services or Case Management if you have questions at 608.252.6540 or 800.486.6276.

AIDS Network's Community Wellness Education

Learn more about caring for yourself and others in your community! Sessions are open to all HIV+ people. Attendance at all sessions is required before applying to be an AIDS Network Peer Supporter.

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| <p>HIV: The Basics October 25 5:30 - 7:30 PM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The truth about how HIV is transmitted. · How HIV affects the body. · Common myths about HIV and AIDS. | <p>Community Resources November 15 5:30 - 7:30 PM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Discover the HIV/AIDS services available in south-central Wisconsin. · When and how to refer others to the services they need. · Considerations for a diverse HIV+ community. |
| <p>Intro to HIV Treatment November 1 5:30 - 7:30 PM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How HIV medications actually work. · What resistance is & how it affects treatment decisions. · Why adherence matters. · What you can do to get the most out of your treatment. | <p>Safer Sex & Prevention December 6 5:30 - 7:30 PM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Understand the principles of the harm reduction approach. · Feel comfortable with the key components of safer sex. · How to talk about sexuality, substance use and HIV prevention. |
| <p>Emotional Support Skills November 8 5:30 - 7:30 PM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Ways to care for yourself and others emotionally. · What a peer can do to help others with emotional and mental health challenges. · Basic communication skills to use when helping others. · How emotional health helps physical health. | <p>Nutrition & Wellness December 13 5:30 - 7:30 PM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Nutrition for people with HIV, presented by a 20-year survivor of HIV. · Supplementing with vitamins and minerals. · Complimentary medicine to improve physical and emotional well-being. |

Get informed ... Get involved

600 Williamson Street, Madison, WI. Please contact Jody at (608) 252-6540 x31 to register.

*** Food will be provided ***

Energy Assistance, submitted by Dan Leamy, Case Manager

I just wanted to remind everyone that, it's that "time of year" where we need to really be thinking about the winter. I wanted to pass on some information that I received at a training a few weeks back about "how to save yourself money". First of all, one great way to save yourself money is by checking the temperature on your thermostat! Are you turning the thermostat down when you are leaving the house? Why heat your apartment or house when no one is there? Do you turn your thermostat down at night before you go to bed? Also, another way is to change your furnace filters to make sure that the filters are clean so your furnace doesn't have to work as hard. How about covering your windows with plastic covering to keep the cold air out and warm air in.? That's just a few good ways to save you money over the winter.

While speaking about energy and finances, if you live in Dane County, have you called to set up your appointment with Energy Services? Many people qualify for the assistance and don't even know it! To find out if you're eligible for Energy Assistance, call 608-267-8601 to check for eligibility and to set up an appointment. The appointment with Energy Assistance takes about 20-30 minutes. If you qualify for assistance, Energy Assistance will send a check directly to your Utility Company. How easy is that? If you have questions, please contact your AIDS Network Case Manager. *If you live outside of Dane County, call your case manager to see if there are any resources in your area.*

Do you find yourself getting notices from your utility companies stating "past due" or, the worst case scenario "disconnection of service"? Utility companies certainly don't want to disconnect service for anyone. However, the utility companies use that as a last resort due to lack of contact from subscribers. If you get a notice from a utility company and you aren't able to pay the bill, or if you can't pay the entire amount requested, please contact the customer service number listed on the statement. Utility companies will generally set up a payment plan with a subscriber to ensure that services aren't interrupted. However, if you don't call, they don't know your circumstances financially. In the experiences of people calling and asking for help, their primary reason for not contacting the utility company is that they are embarrassed that they cannot pay their bill. Customer service representatives are trained to understand peoples circumstances, and will offer suggestions on how to get the bill paid. Also, contact your AIDS Network Case Manager as they can offer some other suggestions for possible additional community based assistance programs.

Servicio de Energía

Yo solo quiero recordarles a todas las personas que es ese "momento del año" en el que realmente necesitamos estar pensando en el invierno. Yo quiero pasarles una información que recibí en un entrenamiento hace unas semanas, es acerca de "Como usted puede ahorrar dinero". Primero que todo una gran forma de ahorrar dinero es revisando la temperatura del termostato! Esta usted bajando el termostato cuando se va de su casa? Porque calentar su apartamento o su casa si no hay nadie en ella? Bajas el termostato en la noche antes de irte a la cama? Otra cosa que puedes hacer es cambiar los filtros de su calefacción para que no tenga que trabajar muy fuerte. Que te parece si cubres tus ventanas con plásticos así ayudas a mantener el aire frío afuera y el caliente adentro? Estas son solo ideas de cómo puedes ahorrar dinero en la época de invierno.

Mientras hablamos de energía y finanzas, has llamado para separar tu cita con el Servicio de Energía? Mucha gente califica para esta ayuda y no lo saben, si quieres saberlo puedes llamar al 608-267-8601 llamando puedes saber si eres elegible y hacer una cita. La cita Con Servicio de Energía se demora entre 20 y 30 minutos. Si usted califica en Servicio de Asistencia le enviara un cheque directamente a su compañía de energía. Que fácil es? Si tiene preguntas por favor llame a su Manejador de Caso en AIDS Network.

Estas recibiendo noticias de las compañías de servicio diciendo que te encuentras "atrasado en tus pagos" o en el peor de los casos que te van a "desconectar el servicio"? Ciertamente las compañías de servicios no le quieren desconectar el servicio a nadie. De todas maneras ellos usan este último recurso por falta de contacto con sus clientes. Si recibes una noticia de ellos de la Compañía de Servicios y no puedes pagar el recibo en su totalidad. Llama al número de teléfono de Servicio al Cliente que se encuentra anotado en el recibo. Las Compañías de servicios te ayudaran a crear un plan de pagos que te ayude a tus servicio no sean interrumpidos. Si no los llamas ellos no saben que tienes problemas financieros. La experiencia muestra que las personas no llaman por que les da vergüenza que decir que no tienen dinero para pagar sus cuentas. Los trabajadores de Servicio al Cliente están Entrenados para entender las circunstancias de los clientes para ofrecer diferentes opciones de pago. También, puedes tu llamar a tu Manejador de Caso de AIDS Network y ellos te podrán colaborar con otras opciones que hay de ayudas de servicio comunitario