Title: “Key Informant Interviews of the Public Health Workforce in Rural Areas of North Florida to Describe Training Needs Associated with Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS”

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ABSTRACT

Description: Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) challenge us to reflect upon the environmental, social, and psychological characteristics of disease. The South is disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS, where about 36% of the United States population resides, and also 40% of AIDS cases. The deadly disease has penetrated the most vulnerable populations living in this area, especially low-income African Americans, resulting in devastating losses of life and heavy stigma in rural communities. Many protective factors that have slowed or prevented the spread of the disease in other populations are missing, such as health insurance, education, and adequate access to health services. In addition, the public health workforce is shrinking and may not be adept to handle the emerging risk. Public health physicians, nurses, case workers, program managers, and entry level staff are leaving the profession in greater numbers than are entering, resulting in a workforce that is essentially aging out. Furthermore, they often lack foundational public health education or training specific to core competencies surrounding the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

Methods: The following describes formative research utilizing key informant interviews to qualitatively assess the workforce training needs focusing on HIV/AIDS in rural, medically underserved areas of North Florida. Interviews were also able to elicit issues and barriers workers are currently facing in their jobs and in the community.

Results & Conclusion: Public health workers perceive a need to receive evidence-based updates on topics surrounding HIV/AIDS, along with information regarding the psychosocial aspects of the disease. There is also a need for training in communication skills, cultural competency, outreach strategies, and coordination of services. However, there are significant barriers preventing rural health department workers from achieving their goals in the community.