PERSONALIZED COGNITIVE COUNSELING (PCC)

An individual-level, single-session counseling intervention for men who have sex with men

FACT SHEET

Program Overview
Personalized Cognitive Counseling (PCC) is an individual-level, single-session counseling intervention designed to reduce condomless anal intercourse (CAI) among men who have sex with men (MSM) who are repeat testing for HIV. PCC focuses on the person’s self-justifications (thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs) that he uses when deciding whether or not to engage in high-risk sexual behavior. PCC is a 30- to 50-minute intervention. It is a six step process. The steps are: (1) screen for eligibility; (2) help the client choose a memorable episode of CAI; (3) have the client complete the Checklist of Thoughts about a memorable CAI episode; (4) draw out the story of the memorable CAI episode; (5) identify self-justifications for engaging in CAI including substance use; and (6) discuss his thoughts about future situations that may lead to CAI. The counselor will then make referrals as necessary for Pre-Exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), substance abuse counseling, and mental health treatment.

Core Elements
The core elements of PCC are:
- Provide one-on-one counseling focusing on a recent, memorable high-risk sexual encounter.
- Provide alongside with counselors trained in HIV counseling and testing and in the PCC intervention.
- Use the Checklist of Thoughts to identify key self-justifications.
- Using the Checklist and subsequent discussion, identify specific self-justifications (thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs) to engage in risky sex.
- Explore the circumstances and context (including substance use) for the risk episode in detail (before, during, and after).
- Clarify how the circumstances and self-justifications are linked to the decision to engage in high-risk behavior.
- Guide the clients to re-examine the thinking that led to their decision to have high-risk sex and identify ways they might think differently in future situations.

Target Population
To be eligible for PCC, the client must be a man who has sex with men, have previously tested HIV-negative and not currently on PrEP, have had CAI since their last HIV test with a non-primary partner who was HIV-positive or unknown, be able to recall the CAI event, and know about HIV risk.

Program Materials
- Implementation Manual (online)
- Participants’ Workbook

Research Results
Research has demonstrated PCC participants have significantly reduced episodes of CAI and are satisfied with the services that they receive. The Project ECHO randomized control trial demonstrated significant reductions in the number of CAI episodes with the three most recent non-primary partners among episodic substance-using MSM.

More Information
For more information on PCC, please visit the Effective Interventions website.

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