

## **Collaborative Project Leads to Positive Outcome for HIV Patients**

Laura Klie got a lot more from her recent practice-based research experience than she expected. She formed new community partnerships, built a stronger professional network and, of course, answered a research question — all which ultimately have improved and enhanced her approach to patient care.

Laura, a social worker in the HIV outpatient clinic at the Sunnybrook campus, admits that a research project wasn't the first thing on her mind when she began meeting with her healthcare colleagues. She explains that the group, comprised of healthcare professionals involved in caring for HIV-positive patients, came together to talk about the increasing number of patients they were seeing who were struggling with depression. The group — including representatives from community agencies, hospitals, AIDS groups and people living with HIV — wanted to develop a treatment program for these patients.

The adhoc project soon turned into a formal research proposal, which looked at whether or not a certain therapy treatment model would be effective in helping people with HIV cope with depression. The study results indicated that short-term psychotherapy is beneficial to these patients.

"It has been an amazing experience because this has really been a working group," Laura says, placing particular emphasis on the "working" description. "We really wanted to do something practical rather than just talking about the problem."

After surveying what type of help was available, the group decided to run a 20-week therapy session using the social work group model to determine if that approach would be effective. "We felt that there wasn't anything similar in the community," Laura notes, adding that there were a number of self-help groups available, but not specifically psychotherapy.

A total of 31 participants were surveyed three times during the study — before the group sessions, immediately after the 20-week sessions concluded and three months after that point. The results indicated that patients experienced an improvement in mood and maintained that improvement at the three-month follow-up point. Feedback from participants was also generally positive and further supported the successful study results.

Laura credits the commitment of the group members and the support of community agencies as two of the key factors in the success of the research project. "The uniqueness of our project in Toronto was our collaboration. It was essential to the success of the project," Laura says. "Most of us at the table had limited research experience and we were working with a limited budget. It has been a long process, but very worthwhile."

Our ultimate goal is to have a group like this running in the community, Laura explains. To that end, the group will stay together to complete a more controlled study to further prove the value and necessity of this kind of long-term therapy program.

The greatest benefit to conducting this type of practice-based research, Laura says, is the positive impact it has on your clinical skills. "Common sense and what you see are both fine, but it's the research that informs you if what you're doing, or not doing, is making a difference."

