

## COMPREHENSIVE PEER WORKER TRAINING

Peer Advanced Competency Training (PACT) Project  
Harlem Hospital Center, Division of Infectious Diseases, 2008

The Peer Advanced Competency Training Program (PACT) at Harlem Hospital was established in 2005 to provide training and technical assistance to HIV/AIDS organizations using peer workers. PACT serves the entire New York City HIV/AIDS community, and offers training and technical assistance in other regions of the United States as well. Both our training and our technical assistance efforts build on many years of experience operating peer programs and training peer workers in the Infectious Diseases Division at Harlem Hospital. These services strengthen and support the important role that HIV peer workers play in the delivery of HIV-related services.

### Curriculum Content and Rationale for 9-Day Course

Formative research results were used to modify and enrich our original course content and schedule. The Comprehensive Peer Worker Training Curriculum comprises three broad content areas: roles of peer workers, HIV/AIDS knowledge, and communication skills. For each session, 'smart' learning objectives were refined and a constellation of appropriate, interactive learning methods were developed. While shorter 4-5 day courses are often popular, our trainees have consistently reported that they prefer longer course schedules. Furthermore, we have found that 9 days are needed to address the content and skill needs identified in our formative research and to ensure that peer trainees acquire knowledge and develop competencies in their diverse roles, HIV/AIDS knowledge, and communication skills. Each of the topics can be delivered separately in a half-hour to one hour workshop format.

Our Comprehensive Course has been offered in two formats: 3 half-days a week for 6 weeks (18 short sessions) or 3 full-days a week for 3 weeks (9 full day sessions). The following session topics are included:

<u>Role of the Peer Worker</u>	<u>HIV/AIDS Knowledge</u>	<u>Communication Skills</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoting Health &amp; Well Being</li><li>• Peer Challenges &amp; Successes</li><li>• Coping with HIV / Disclosure</li><li>• Confidentiality / HIPAA</li><li>• Community Outreach</li><li>• Maintaining Benefits while Working</li><li>• Advocacy &amp; Working with Community Groups that Serve PLWHA</li><li>• Community Advisory Boards</li><li>• Workplace Challenges</li><li>• Professional Standards &amp; Working as Part of a Multidisciplinary Team</li><li>• Resolving Conflicts at Work</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HIV 101 Review</li><li>• HIV Life Cycle, Disease Progression, &amp; Epidemiology</li><li>• Care &amp; Treatment (HAART)</li><li>• Adherence, Tools, &amp; Support</li><li>• Rapid Testing</li><li>• Mental Health &amp; HIV</li><li>• Substance Use / Harm Reduction</li><li>• Sexually Transmitted Infections</li><li>• Opportunistic Infections</li><li>• Hepatitis C</li><li>• Prevention for Positives</li><li>• People over 50 &amp; HIV</li><li>• Women &amp; HIV</li><li>• Adolescents &amp; HIV</li><li>• Transgender Persons &amp; HIV</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listening Skills</li><li>• Expressing Yourself</li><li>• Counseling</li><li>• Stages of Change Model</li><li>• Communicating Health Information</li><li>• Advocacy with Providers</li><li>• Cultural Competency</li><li>• Building Communication Skills</li></ul>

A sample course schedule follows.

### **Adult Education Principles are embodied in its design by:**

- Building on participants' knowledge, understanding, and previous experience
- Focusing training on what participants can apply practically in their immediate circumstances
- Presenting content in a structured way so it may be more easily integrated with what they already know
- Allowing opportunity for active learning, when students process information, solve problems, or practice skills – individually and in small groups
- Communicating consistent technical information in clear language that the participants can understand
- Matching the speed of presenting information with the speed at which participants can learn
- Giving immediate feedback to participants about their own learning
- Reinforcing the training through TA to ASO/CBOs to strengthen management and supervision

### **Several aspects make our training programs uniquely successful:**

- Learning progresses at an appropriate pace – from easier to more complex information. Each block of content is followed by opportunity to apply the information by practicing new skills and using the new information in role plays, simulations, individual or group exercises, or demonstrations.
- Experienced infectious disease clinicians and peer program managers are trainers. Ample time is scheduled for peer educators to learn from these clinicians and have all of their medical questions answered in language they can understand. Peer program managers have 'been there, done that' and know what works.
- Pre-tests used at the beginning of training courses are evaluated the same day to provide trainers with information to fine tune their training content and approach. Any doubts, misconceptions, or outdated information participants may have are clarified by updating the information or skills practice that targets the training need.
- The diversity of models of peer programs in New York City make discussions very rich with practical personal experiences and troubleshooting tips.
- Experienced training team members coordinate sessions and manage time effectively throughout the course. Icebreakers and energizers often set the tone for participants as well as introduce the content of the next topic

### **Staff and Non-Staff Trainers**

The Training Coordinator works closely with all faculty to help them prepare **presentations with clear objectives** and which are appropriate to the target audience. Training team meetings before each course are used to make sure that faculty have the most **current knowledge and information**, and are prepared to use the **presentation methods and interactive exercises** that are appropriate for the audience and level of training. All participants take home copies of the curricula, reference materials, and learning tools.

Rather than being generic trainers, the PACT teaching faculty are practicing clinicians, senior peer mentors, and peer program managers who themselves are experts in the topics on which they present. While many faculty are associated with Harlem Hospital peer programs, we also

utilize outside faculty for specific topics, such as legal and transgender issues. A peer trainer is involved in all training steps from planning through delivery. The peer trainer is responsible for delivering certain content, conducting icebreakers and energizers, and assisting with training logistics. When we have trained outside of New York City, we have used local physicians and others to deliver content on certain topics, particularly medical information and documentation requirements.

### **Evaluation of Trainer's Performance and Skills**

Multiple evaluation strategies are used, including pre/post tests (pre-tests evaluated same day), and anonymous participant feedback forms that will be collected. In addition, at least one additional member of the training team is present at all training activities and uses a checklist to assess each individual trainer's performance and skills. Trainers have a follow up meeting or phone call to debrief the Training Coordinator after each course and discuss evaluation findings.

### **Training Venues**

We have conducted this training in a variety of settings, including medical centers, community-based organizations, colleges or universities, restaurants, training centers, and a bowling alley. Any available place can work if you can provide a comfortable room for all participants, essential training equipment (projector, wall, flipcharts, etc.), extra space for small group activities, storage of training materials, and access to meals on site or nearby in the community. Make sure that each venue is set up to promote thought, focus, discourse, and learning by ensuring a secure, comfortable, and non-distracting environment.