

Community pharmacists support more involved role in customers' HIV treatment

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Community pharmacists in the United States have a unique opportunity to consult with customers about HIV treatment when selling over-the-counter HIV tests, according to a study by researchers at the Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington, the Rural Center for AIDS/STD Prevention and Butler University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences.

In a study lead by Beth Meyerson, co-director of the Rural Center for AIDS/STD Prevention, Indiana licensed [community pharmacists](#) reported that they wanted an active role of consultation when customers purchased over-the-counter HIV tests. A rapid HIV home test kit was approved by FDA in the summer of 2012 and is being sold through the U.S. in pharmacies and on the Internet.

"Pharmacists understood the benefit of greater access to HIV testing, but they felt that their role as pharmacists was beyond that of OTC test seller," Meyerson said. "Instead, pharmacists saw themselves as health consultants and wished to build on the strong relationships that they have with customers during the point at which they sell the test.

"The pharmacy system could be an effective environment for HIV consultation because it would help to strengthen the current system of linkage to care," Meyerson said. Currently, 20 percent of those living with HIV do not yet know it in the U.S.; but among those who do, only 24 percent are in [treatment](#) with suppressed [viral loads](#). "This essentially means that people are not testing for HIV, that they are not properly

linked to treatment when they do test positive, and they are not maintained in care."

She said [rural communities](#) have the most to gain from an engaged pharmacy environment because these communities often lack an HIV testing and treatment infrastructure, and people often feel stigmatized about HIV testing.

"If pharmacists are engaged and supportive, then it might help to increase the number of those who test for HIV and also the number of people linked to HIV treatment," she said.

Provided by Indiana University

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