Lessons Learned from Implementing a Black Caucus into HPTN 061: Demonstrated Community Engagement

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BACKGROUND

• Black MSM (BMSM) represent 25% of new HIV infections annually despite having lower sexual risk behaviors than White MSM.
• Urgent need to obtain specific information about the diversity of BMSM cultures.
• HPTN 061 is a community-level feasibility study conducted in 8 US communities to determine acceptability of a multi-component HIV-prevention intervention with BMSM.
• HPTN 061 offered a unique opportunity to characterize the epidemic with a focus on seeking a deeper understanding of BMSM characteristics.

This analysis focuses on recommendations from the HPTN Black Caucus to improve site community engagement, recruitment and retention strategies.

METHODS/STUDY DESIGN

• A qualitative-methodological approach was incorporated in this research.
• Individual interviews were conducted with 11 participants who provided scientific expertise to the design of HPTN 061 or helped shape the Black Caucus.
• Utilized purposive sampling until the point of saturation was reached.

DATA COLLECTION

• Meeting minutes for HPTN 061 protocol development calls were reviewed to identify BMSM pivotal to the design of HPTN 061 to be interviewed.
• Interviewees were emailed and followed up with phone calls that delineated the interview process.
• Individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews were administered face to face or by telephone and consisted of 12 open-ended questions, covering three areas: (1) introduction/background information, (2) how does the Black Caucus address the needs of BMSM, and (3) the function of the Black Caucus.

RESULTS

Exemplary themes emerged related to the following domains:

• The role of the Black Caucus in shaping HPTN 061
• How the Black Caucus addresses the needs of BMSM in HPTN 061
• Discussing and identifying the development and function of the Black Caucus

THE ROLE OF THE BLACK CAUCUS SHAPING THE HPTN

Developed from interest and critical insights from members of the Black Gay Research Group (BGRG) and the National Black Gay Men’s Advocacy Coalition (NBGAMC).

Emergent safer issues:

• A lack of inclusion of BMSM on the 061 research protocol team
• An absence of BMSM researchers in the research process
• A lack of qualitative components in the HPTN 061 study design

“...We looked at it and we were like, something isn’t right about this. There were some issues that weren’t even being addressed. Like STIs, weren’t even being talked about. At that time there was no qualitative piece. So aside from these epidemiological profiles, there was no way to really understand the stories of these black men.”

HOW THE BLACK CAUCUS ADDRESSES THE NEEDS OF BMSM COMMUNITIES (INFLUENCE OF RACE AND SEXUAL IDENTITY)

Black Caucus members commited reflected a deep concern about race and the lack of inclusion of BMSM in key decision-making processes.

“Racial and cultural/identity struggles were imminent with developing HPTN 061 addressing these factors became top priority over time and was captured and addressed mostly on behalf of the Black Caucus. It was explicitly clear acknowledgement of such identities in order to press the agenda—forward in addressing the public health concern of Black MSM. Due to the stated factors around Black MSM contracting HIV it was imperative to keep these identities in the forefront while developing the protocol.”

Recommendations developed for the HPTN leadership that included:

• Diversity leadership
• Increase amount of BMSM at each site

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF BMSM

The HPTN Black Caucus ensures that the design, implementation, analysis and interpretation of study data are racially and culturally appropriate and that the study is responsive to the needs of BMSM. Contributions of the Black Caucus can be divided into three distinct areas:

• Cultural Competence
• Design/Implementation

“...The caucus helped the peer health navigator shift from a purely health focus model to a more community-centered focus based on the beginning interaction with the participants. This change recognizes the comprehensive needs that lie within the Black MSM community including housing, employment and skills development. Working with clinical research sites to establish clinics in convenient locations, ensuring the clinics were open at times that were best for the participants, and establishing a respectful consensus for the participants within those settings.”

• To increase retention among all sites, the Black Caucus developed a retention analysis covering burden/benefit analysis, intervention delivery and community engagement.

ANALYSIS

INTERVENTION DELIVERY

• Increased flexibility around accommodating participants
• Increase cultural competency at site levels

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

• Development of standard locator forms
• Identify ways to shorten visits
• Increase acceptability and functionality of staff
• Analyzing dedicated attrition efforts

CONCLUSION / NEXT STEPS

• HPTN 061 was the first study of its type to establish a Black Caucus to serve as a key informarian
• The formation of the Black Caucus was based on CBPR concepts
• The Black Caucus functioned to provide a vehicle whereby the silent voices of BMSM can be heard, respected and understood
• The Black Caucus model should be duplicated across all of the DADDS funded study networks with BMSM and other hard to reach at risk populations

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