

3 HIV+ Clients Back in Care

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Nurses Melissa Jacob and Natalie Lehman, St. Jude's, Atlanta

According to the CDC, about 80% of new HIV transmissions are from persons who are not receiving regular care or do not know that they are infected. So this quarter, when nurses at St. Jude's Recovery in Atlanta helped three HIV-positive clients return to treatment, it was significant. "We try to make sure that any HIV-positive client has the medical care that they need – whether we give them the diagnosis or or they come in from the street and haven't been taking their medicine," says Natalie Lehman. But helping people get into treatment is only the beginning. After each medical appointment, clients have a follow up meeting with nurses to discuss their progress.

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St. Jude's Recovery Center serves over 1,500 clients a year. The nonprofit organization provides a full continuum of care that includes detoxification, intensive day treatment, residential and outpatient treatment services, medication-assisted treatment, individual and group counseling, primary healthcare, employment assistance, recovery residences, and permanent housing.

"Melissa and I are in a position to see people at the very beginning of their journey to recovery and we get to follow their story," says Natalie. "The care we offer is holistic; we want every area of their life to be improved. HIV testing and linkage to care is a critical part of our approach to wellness. We try to help them make a plan for a better future."

"Even though many of our clients are not ready to take care of themselves in the way that we might like," says Melissa Jacobs, "change is a process – and it's a powerful thing to have a role in someone's recovery."

"I couldn't be more proud of Melissa and Natalie," says Director of Nursing Mary Jean Millikan. "At St. Jude's, we bring passion to what we do, but these two bring more than most. It is a beautiful thing to be a part of." ■