

# Testing Up at Woodstock

More HIV tests this quarter than all of last year thanks to routine, opt-out HIV testing.



Nurse Practitioner Chrystal Hawkins and LMSW Gaelyn Soutar

**H**IV testing at the medication assisted treatment clinic Woodstock is up dramatically this quarter – they tested more this quarter than in all of last year. How? Nurse Practitioner Chrystal Hawkins credits the switch to routine testing for all patients at intake and annual physical. “When we first began to do HIV testing, clients who were interested signed up and a counselor tested them. Now that the nursing staff is HIV EIS certified, HIV testing is routine and opt-out.”

Early on, Woodstock staff members wanted to be clear

about what to do if a patient was diagnosed HIV-positive or a new client disclosed that they were HIV-positive and not taking medication. Chrystal reached out to her contact the local office of the Department of Public Health to learn the protocol, “so that when we’re talking to the client, we’re not rummaging around for information - we know exactly who to call and who we can put the patient in direct contact with.”

Since learning that DPH is also a source for condoms, Woodstock has arranged to receive free condoms, lubrication, and educational materials. “They are even going to provide a dispenser for the bathroom that makes condoms and lube accessible to patients reluctant to ask for those products in a general location. And now, every six weeks we get a big beautiful box of condoms, educational material, and lubrication,” says Chrystal.

“I have seen this program work - seen people regain custody of their children, earn a degree.”

“Here at Woodstock we take a holistic approach; we don’t restrict our focus to substance use. It’s a big issue, but there are so many things that can happen in someone’s life that impact their ability to stop using illicit drugs. As a healthcare provider we realize that in order to achieve wellbeing, clients need shelter and food to eat. They need to feel safe. We don’t expect people to recover without resources or coping skills. Our vision is to provide a safe route to the best life that each patient can live – not someone else’s idea of a best life, their own definition of the best life.” ■