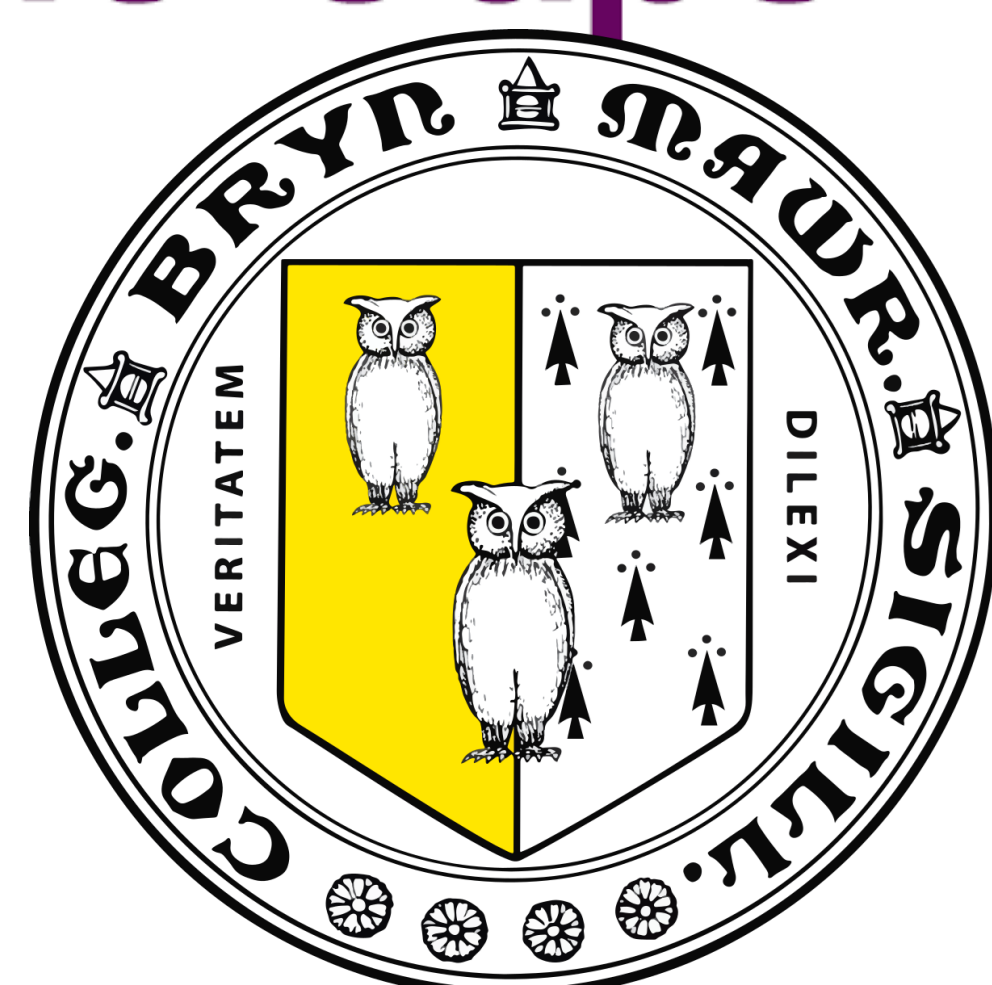


Bridging the Gaps



The Scoop on PrEP and Navigating the Treatment of HIV

Student Interns

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COMMUNITY PARTNER

Community Partner: Mazzoni Center

The Mazzoni Center provides health and wellness services to the LGBTQ+ community. Located at Broad and Bainbridge, the Mazzoni Center provides gender affirming care, health care, testing and prevention, as well as mental health support. Their mission is to provide quality comprehensive health and wellness services in an LGBTQ-focused environment, while preserving the dignity and improving the quality of life of the individuals they serve.

<https://www.mazzonicenter.org/about-us>



BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

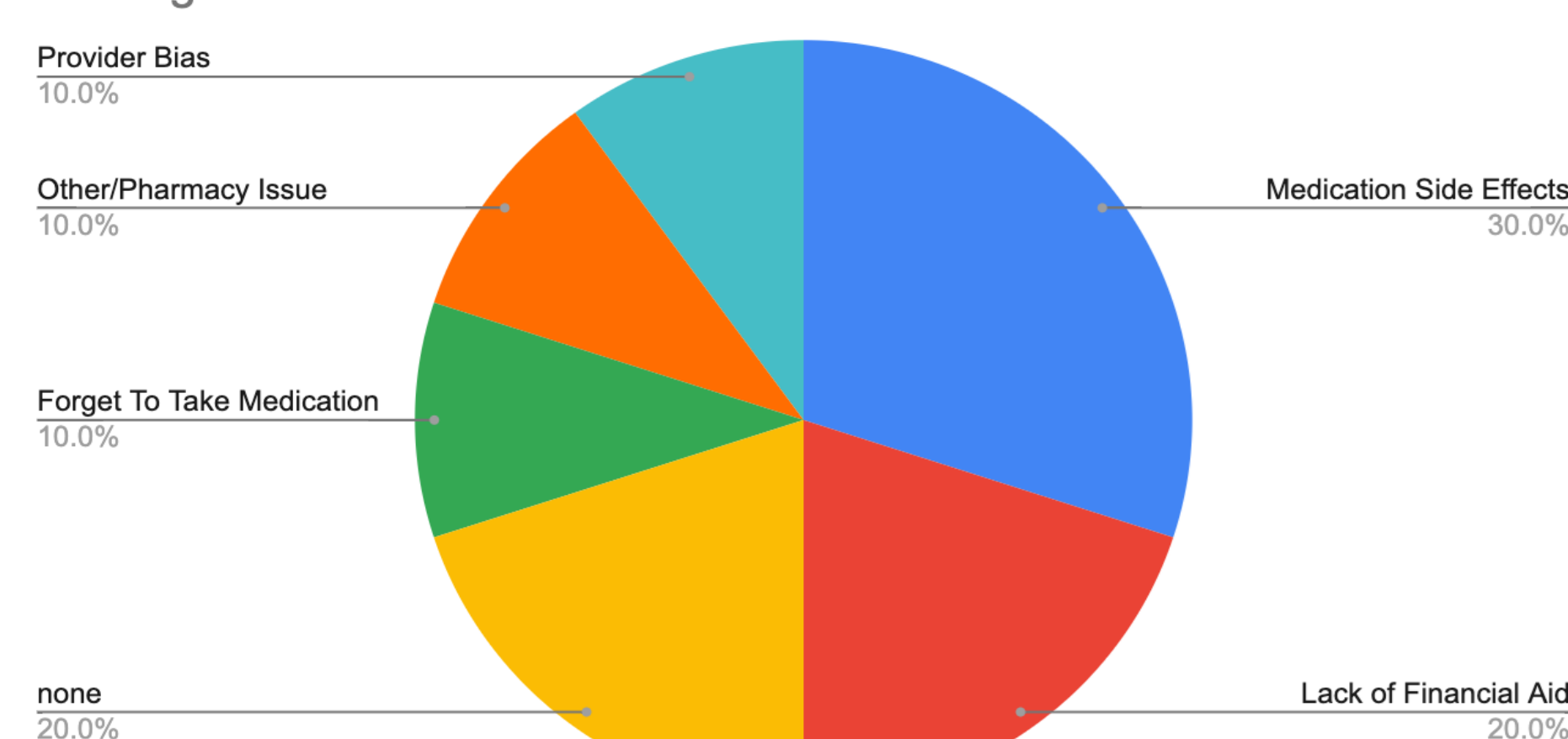
- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) refers to a medication that can reduce one's chance of contracting HIV during sex with an HIV positive partner or from IV drug use. Many people in the LGBTQ+ community can benefit from the use of PrEP. However, there are barriers to PrEP adherence, including awareness of PrEP, perception of HIV risk, stigma from healthcare providers/systems, financial barriers, and side effects. We wanted to learn more about the specific barriers to PrEP that patients at the Mazzoni Center experience. To explore this, we conducted a survey for patients that have been prescribed PrEP.
- The Care Services department provides Medical Case Management services for patients living with HIV/AIDS. Our patients who are HIV+ who have low/limited incomes are all eligible for funding through the Ryan White program, which affords patients greater access to healthcare, the Food Bank, and other important resources.

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

- Based on our PrEP survey results, we have come up with some proposals, which include hiring more case coordinators to help navigate insurance issues and regularly check in with patients about PrEP, as well as having a peer mentor program to increase support for patients. We have also come up with an idea for a phone application for patients to keep track of their PrEP usage and sexual activity and look up sexual health resources. Additionally, we think it could be beneficial to work on educating non-queer health centers and the straight community on PrEP. Lastly, we believe having a Mazzoni pharmacy and medication deliveries could improve pharmacy issues.
- Additionally, we created a few resources for Mazzoni patients, including an insurance pamphlet with key insurance terms defined, a pamphlet on sexual health practices with information about when to get tested for different STIs, and a pamphlet with information about the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWAIP) and Special Pharmaceutical Benefits Program (SPBP).
- We also provided support to the Medical Case Management team by creating more streamlined systems for collecting and managing data digitally to ensure the most privacy possible for the patients.
- We served the community by working with the Food Bank by sharing resources about promoting cardiovascular health and creating bags of food. We helped with preparation for the Trans Wellness Conference hosted by the Mazzoni Center, so that patients could still access food during the event.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES/ JOYS

What barriers to medication adherence have you encountered since starting PrEP?



- We were able to speak with 28 patients about their experience taking PrEP
- There are a wide variety of reasons patients struggle with PrEP adherence
- Although PrEP is covered by insurance or assistance programs, these programs are often difficult to navigate
- Any one of these factors or combination of these factors can pose difficulties for patients who wish to take PrEP
- We got to hear many incredible stories...

"I moved here from Jamaica because of Homophobia. Stigma is a concern for me. I'm living with my sister who does not know I am gay. I'm worried she will find my pill bottle...I'm very appreciative of all that Mr. Carter [case worker] does for me. He checks in on me."

Meeting the "legacy patients," members of the community that have been receiving healthcare and medical case management services for several decades was one of the most rewarding experiences from the internship. It felt like a privilege to hear some of their stories, and it is very inspiring to connect with people who paved the way and pushed for the social changes that enabled us to be where we are today.

REFLECTION

Lex Farrah, Serena Maity, Samantha Mauser, and Gregory Whitehorn: Our internships at Mazzoni have inspired us to further consider what it means to be a compassionate healthcare provider. There are so many people within the LGBTQ+ community that justifiably do not trust the medical system as a result of a history of systemic neglect and institutionalized discrimination. However, in every facet, the practitioners and staff at the Mazzoni Center work incredibly hard to provide patients with the care they need. The Mazzoni Center puts the patient first. Through navigators and care coordinators, Medical Case Managers and other social services, the Mazzoni Center supports patients by providing resources and healthcare services to populations that traditionally did not have access to such in the past. Overall, It has been a pleasure to learn from the Mazzoni team. We look forward to applying our newfound knowledge as we continue on our journey to become clinicians and compassionate care workers ourselves.