Purpose of this study
This randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluated the Computer Assessment & Rx Education for HIV-positive people (CARE+), an intervention for improving antiretroviral therapy (ART) adherence and reducing HIV transmission by people living with HIV. CARE+ is a computerized counseling intervention delivered on touchscreen tablets. At the beginning of the intervention, the participant selects an avatar, who serves as a “guide” through all the components of CARE+. The intervention includes an audio-narrated assessment, tailored feedback, skill-building videos, health plan, and printout with referrals.

How was the study conducted and who was involved?
The study recruited 240 participants in Seattle, WA from a university-affiliated HIV clinic and a community-based HIV service organization. Participants were randomly divided into two groups: (1) an intervention group receiving the Care+ intervention, and (2) a control group receiving a computerized behavior assessment and standard care only. Participants from both groups had 4 sessions over a 9-month period.

What were the key findings of the study?
- At 9-month follow-up, those in the CARE+ intervention group, compared to those in the control group:
  - had reduced viral load (VL) and reported an increased percentage of ART medication doses taken (among those with detectable VL at baseline)
  - reported a decrease in sexual transmission behaviors
- The CARE+ intervention was equally effective in both health care settings.
- The CARE+ intervention was well received, with participants finding it easy to use, the right length, and providing enough privacy. They judged it to be as much or more helpful than face-to-face counseling from a staff member.

What might this mean for organizations and institutions concerned with ART medication adherence and HIV sexual transmission?
Computer-delivered counseling can be effective in promoting increased medication adherence and decreased sexual transmission behaviors in persons with HIV, freeing staff to concentrate on other issues requiring staff-client interactions.

Where can you find more information about this study?
Or contact Ann Kurth, CNM, PhD at akurth@nyu.edu

For more information about the CARE+ tool, including a demo, see ronline.com/projects/care.aspx or contact Jim Larkin at jim@ronline.com

Supported by grants from the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (K01PS000066 – Kurth) and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (P30AI027757 – UW CFAR).