

Ogeechee Applies Standard of Excellence to Rapid Testing



Dianne Spence (center) during rapid HIV testing site visit.

Ogeechee likes to do things right. And they have put tremendous thought into the very best way to do rapid HIV testing at their agency. “We have policies and procedures (P&P) for everything,” says HIV EIS Coordinator Dianne Spence, “ethics, rights and responsibilities, infection control—everything across the board.” And rapid HIV testing is no exception. Dianne met with Ogeechee Accreditation and Quality Management Director Kathy Chalker to go over the template (provided to grads of rapid HIV testing training) line by line. Spence explained the medical language and together the pair worked their way

through the 64-page document, deciding what to keep and exactly how to word it. Ultimately, they integrated Clearview rapid HIV testing P&P with the existing OraSure P&P, tailoring the guidelines specifically for the Ogeechee organization. “When the Joint Commission comes in they’ll find everything to do with rapid testing in writing, step-by-step, including what to do when something goes wrong,” explains Spence. The new procedures require all nurses doing rapid testing—currently Lucy Sapp, Margaret McGraw, and Dianne Spence have completed the training—to understand the P&P.

Rapid testing takes on new meaning in rural communities where many consumers have little or no transportation. With gas prices on the rise, what was once a challenge has become, for some, an insurmountable obstacle. “We have many low-income substance abuse consumers who don’t feel they can afford to come back just for results.” As of September, Ogeechee is able to counter this by offering rapid testing. “We love being able to test a consumer and then give them their results on the same day,” says Dianne.

At the same time, giving results in 20 minutes can be challenging, so Ogeechee found a way to insert a pause between *reading* the results and giving them to the consumer: after collecting a sample in the lab, the nurse sets a timer, picks it up, and escorts her consumer to the nursing office for an assessment and prevention counseling. When the timer rings, she

heads for the lab, returning a moment later to do post-test counseling. The separation of counseling and testing area, by design, allows nurses time to collect themselves before delivering the results. “I don’t want to look at the test and give the results in that split second,” says Spence. “I need a minute to think about what I’m going to say.”

Although the number of consumers is down because of rising gas prices, a higher percentage now agree to be tested when offered the Clearview Complete rapid HIV test. “They’d rather get a finger stick than have to wait three days for the results. And it really saves the nurses a lot of time. They don’t have to schedule another appointment for post-test counseling; they can do it all in one visit.”

What’s next for Ogeechee? Their first outreach effort. And they plan to use rapid testing. Stay tuned.