Disease Intervention Specialist (DIS)

Fact Sheet

What is a DIS?

Disease Intervention Specialist (DIS) are public health staff who are responsible for finding and counseling people with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). DIS are trained professionals informed about the causes and spread of STDs, and knowing where to refer people for evaluation and treatment. DIS also provide counseling about behaviors that put a person at risk for STDs, including HIV infection. DIS focus on providing patients with accurate information about STDs and how to prevent future infection, as well as notifying and locating unaware partners so they can receive confidential and prompt diagnosis and treatment.

Did you know?

There are approximately 58 DIS stationed across Virginia. Contact your **local health department** to connect with the DIS assigned to your area.

What does a DIS do?

The role of the DIS is to ensure that the patient receives appropriate treatment and educational counseling, and that their partners are notified and brought in for testing and treatment. This may include sex or needle-sharing partners, as well as other contacts potentially exposed to infection. DIS conduct voluntary interviews with patients to obtain the names and contact information of their partners and use that information to contact these partners and notify them of their potential exposure. This work helps to break the chain of disease transmission within a community.

Generally, the patient and the DIS agree upon a plan to assure that high-risk partners are notified. In some instances, the patient decides to notify and refer their partners. In this case, the DIS provides coaching on how to do this successfully. In other cases, patients prefer that the DIS inform their partner. When a DIS notifies exposed partners, identifying information about the original patient is never disclosed.

Patient Navigators

Patient navigators are trained peers who assist patients with entry and retention in various healthcare services, including HIV care. Patient navigators often work with DIS to ensure that HIV patients are linked to appropriate medical and social support services. They may also provide education, counseling, and assistance with reducing barriers to care, such as transportation and health insurance.

How Can DIS Help?

DIS are available to help medical providers locate patients who have been tested but did not receive positive test results or treatment. In such cases, DIS can act as an agent of the medical provider, using their resources and experience to locate these patients. Once located, patients can be referred back to the original provider or to the health department for treatment. **DIS can also help medical providers locate contact partners** to notify them of possible exposure and offer testing and treatment.

Finally, DIS work with both medical providers and community-based organizations to ensure that patients receive the care they need. For example, **DIS can help link patients to additional services** such as financial aid, housing, and mental health. Patient navigators also help with linkages to care and other support services.