

April 23, 2008 Wednesday

AFC and TPAN host HIV wellness portal online

By: Matt Simonette

The AIDS Foundation of Chicago and Test Positive Aware Network launched an online education portal April 15 on general wellness and other strategies to improve mental and physical health for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Funded by the National Library of Medicine, the multi-media educational program, called PEERSpeak is especially geared toward people newly diagnosed with HIV.

"Too often HIV/AIDS information is presented online in dry, technical language that fails to resonate with the learner," said AFC Vice President David Ernesto Munar.

"PEERSpeak offers accurate, up-to-date HIV information through the empathetic voice of others living with HIV/AIDS. This is not a lecture; it's a conversation between peers," said Matt Sharp, Director of Treatment Education at TPAN.

PEERSpeak utilizes colorful graphics and character-based audio to guide users through five self-care modules, developed primarily by HIV-positive people who are successfully navigating their own HIV diagnosis and treatment.

Users are placed in the role of various HIV/AIDS service providers and follow the fictional "peer" characters through key moments in their treatment- including an initial doctor's visit, a meeting with a case manager, and beginning their HIV treatment. The modules cover topics such as finding the right doctor, treatment options and tips, healthy living, the importance of social support, and mental health issues.

The multi-format presentation also allows individuals with low literacy skills and cognitive disabilities to use the modules for self-education and service referrals. PEERSpeak is designed to help service providers improve their skills assisting people with HIV/AIDS. AFC also plans to use the "Navigating the System" and "Treating HIV" modules as training tools for case managers.

PEERSpeak will be hosted at the AIDS Community Website. The modules can be accessed at aidschicago.org/community.