Increasing HIV Testing and Diagnosis for Men Who Have Sex With Men Using Social Networks for Self-Test Distribution

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Study Objective
Examine the efficacy of a network-based self-testing strategy to identify undiagnosed HIV infection among African American and Latino men who have sex with men (MSM) in comparison to the local public health department’s targeted HIV testing program.

Background
- Men who have sex with men (MSM) continue to be disproportionately impacted globally by the HIV epidemic.
- Novel strategies are needed to increase identification of HIV through testing.
- HIV Self-testing (HIVST) was approved by the FDA in 2012, and studies show that HIVST is highly acceptable among MSM.
- Social network strategies to increase testing are effective in reaching MSM, particularly MSM of color, who may not otherwise test.

Methods
Intervention – Project T:
- Peer recruiters were trained on the basics of HIV, testing, and providing support to friends during testing.
- Each peer was given 5 HIVST kits to distribute to members of their social and sexual networks.
- Testers were asked to complete an online survey after using the HIVST kit.
  - Survey domains included: demographics; self-testing experience; HIV testing history; healthcare access; and sexual behavior.
- Peer recruiters received $25 for their participation and testers received $25 for survey completion. Testing was not incentivized.

Analysis:
We used chi-squared tests to compare the number of first time testers and new HIV diagnoses through Project T to African American and Latino MSM testers in a traditional community-based HIV testing program, during an overlapping time period.

Findings
- Peer recruiters distributed 165 HIVST kits to social network members.
- 116 testers completed the online survey.

Results: Testing Outcomes
- Compared to MSM tested through the government sponsored traditional testing program, those tested in Project T were:
  - more likely to have never tested
  - more likely to report a positive test result overall
  - more likely to report a positive test result if their last test was negative
  - 5.2% of tester declined to provide a test result.

Discussion and Conclusions
- Findings suggest that a network-based strategy for HIVST distribution has the potential to reach MSM who may not seek out testing on their own.
- Large-scale studies are needed to determine the efficacy of this strategy, and if it is replicable in other geographic locations and populations.