Title: Telling partners about chlamydia: how acceptable are the new technologies?

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear editor,

Re: Telling partners about chlamydia: how acceptable are the new technologies?

Thank you for the comments from the reviewers. We have provided a revised manuscript with changes as listed below.

Reviewer: Matthew Hogben

Comment


Response

We have added in the two references suggested by the reviewer:


Comment
Can you clarify if everyone assumed they were the source case? It seemed that way from the quotes...

Response
In the study we did not ascertain whether the participants believed they were the source or the recipient of the infection. The following has been added to Methods, p6 para 2: “We did not ascertain whether participants believed they had been infected by partners or whether they had exposed partners to chlamydia.” As we did not obtain this information we are unable to elaborate on this point in the Discussion.

Comment
Tell the reader if SMS/email use was biased toward those with many partners.

Response
While we understand the reviewer’s interest in this question, we believe it would be inappropriate to try to answer this first question from the data. We have qualitative data, not a random sample, and so we cannot presume the sample is unbiased. The study was designed to offer the broad range of opinions and attitudes which exist on this issue, and so we cannot try to link behaviour with responses in this very small sample - that would need to be done by a larger survey.

Comment
P18. Is the Bilardi paper from the same dataset? Please clarify (if the answer is no, we're set)

Response
No, the Bilardi paper is from a separate study so there is no overlap between the participants in this study and those in the Bilardi paper although many of the individuals in both studies were recruited in Melbourne.

Comment
P20. Your text conclusion is more nuanced than the abstract, which more or less shuns technological methods aside. These should match more closely than they do.

Response
We agree with this assessment. The challenge was to capture succinctly in the abstract the number and complexities of themes described in the results. However, we have made some amendments to the abstract so that is better reflects these subtleties. The following section in the abstract, results: “Email was often seen as impersonal and only acceptable in specific circumstances. SMS was generally considered the least acceptable method for telling partners with most interviewees seeing it as cold, rude and cowardly. However, a small number of interviewees were enthusiastic about an anonymous SMS facility. Interviewees were concerned that emails and SMS could be misunderstood, not
taken seriously or shown to others.” has been changed to: “Email was often seen as less personal while SMS was generally considered the least acceptable method for telling partners. There was also concern that emails and SMS could be misunderstood, not taken seriously or shown to others. Despite these, email and SMS were seen to be advantageous or useful depending on the circumstances.”

For consistency, we have amended the following paragraph in the discussion (p18): “By comparison, the new technologies such as email and SMS were thought by most to be inappropriate for partner notification because they were viewed as being remote, impersonal and uncaring. The unacceptability of email and SMS for partner notification has been reported in other studies. [13-15]. However, in one study, almost a third of people who had not contacted all their partners agreed that having access to web-based tools such as anonymous email and SMS would have encouraged them to contact more partners [13] and evaluation of a service that facilitates the sending of electronic cards to sexual partners has shown high uptake [11,16].” to: “By comparison, the new technologies such as email and SMS were thought by most to be less personal. The lower acceptability of email and SMS for partner notification has been reported in other studies. [13-15]. Despite these, email and SMS were seen to be appropriate and useful in some circumstances. In one study, almost a third of people who had not contacted all their partners agreed that having access to web-based tools such as anonymous email and SMS would have encouraged them to contact more partners [13] and evaluation of services that facilitates the sending of electronic cards, SMS and email to sexual partners have shown substantial uptake [11,16].”

Comment
Shouldn’t the Levine ref (16) be cited around p5?
Response
Reference 16 has been cited on p5 replacing the previous reference 11 as suggested.

Comment
P10. I got a little lost on the first read of the opinions section… I advise adding a few words to the introductory comments along the lines of “…discussing personally with the partner unless”…
Response
We have added the following to the introductory paragraph on p10 to help guide the reader on the overall findings. This is in line with amendments referred to above: “However, SMS and email were seen to be appropriate, useful or even advantageous depending on the circumstances.”

Reviewer: Tim Menza
Comment
Identify the reasons why invited patients and clients declined to participate. Are there any factors that distinguish those who declined participation from those who did not?

Response
We did not collect data on the reasons why people did not participate so we cannot expand on this.

Comment
Flesh out the limitations just a bit more. This is a small study: 66 invited, 40 (60%) agreed and were able to take part. Selection may be biased and it may be worth thinking about the way in which participants were selected might have impacted the results. I appreciate the acknowledgement of discrepancies in this study and studies of partner notification practices among MSM.

Response
The following has been added to the discussion of limitations, p19: “A limitation of the study was the limited number of participants in the study, in particular…” We have also added the following to the same paragraph: “Most participants were recruited from sexual health services, where partner notification is generally well recognized and supported. It is possible that the experiences and opinions of chlamydia-infected individuals may differ in situations where clinicians are less adept at discussing and managing partner notification. [18]

Yours sincerely,

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