Reviewers report

Title: Evaluation of a communication strategy to increase awareness and the appropriate use of non-occupational post-exposure prophylaxis (nPEP) for HIV prevention

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Reviewer: Jessica Draughon

Reviewers report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this contribution to the growing body of literature on non-occupational postexposure prophylaxis. The authors have written a brief article reporting a straightforward analysis on a complex, important public health issue.

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS:

1. From the data provided, the nPEP monitoring system covers other groups than gay men/MSM, yet these groups are not reported separately. I understand this communication strategy was targeted to gay men however the chi-squared analysis was used for the entire nPEP monitoring system. If possible, parsing out the data in Table 1 to be specific to gay men/MSM would improve the overall congruence of the article. As the analysis stands the effect on immediate and ultimate outcomes attributable to the communication strategy may be either over or under reported. If it is not possible to separate out the relevant data, the authors should note this in the limitations.

2. Table 1: would it be possible to include the subgroups of the nPEP recipients here as well? In other words – nPEP after sexual assault n(%), nPEP after consensual exposure among women n(%) / among MSM n(%) etc?

3. Limitations are very briefly covered. A subheading in the discussion section would allow for easier comprehension by readers.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISION:

1. Abstract: Also, who are the “groups at risk of HIV infection” mentioned in the background paragraph? The rest of the abstract would lead one to believe that the focus of the article is very much on gay men, when in fact, the nPEP database includes all non-occupational exposures.

2. Methods, Awareness of nPEP among gay men: How was awareness measured and/or operationalized? Was it simply that they knew what it was? Or did it also include knowledge of appropriate use?

3. Methods: Although the authors supply readers with citations of the PGCPS, a sentence describing the data from the PGCPS surveys used for the present analysis would be helpful.
4. Methods, Awareness of nPEP among gay men: The authors may want to clarify about the timing of the PGCPS data as the communication strategy was implemented in 2005 yet the “pre” data includes information coming from the ’06 PGCPS. This may muddy results.

5. Results, Under Immediate Outcomes: Awareness of nPEP among health care providers
   a. Although the communication strategy targeted physicians other than the sexuality sensitive physicians, only the sexuality sensitive physicians were surveyed. This limits the generalizability of the health care provider awareness data and should be acknowledged in the limitations.

6. Discussion: The paragraph starting “In contrast to the evaluation…” may benefit from some restructuring. The third sentence seems to include two different thoughts, perhaps there is a period missing after [13]? Also the sentence beginning “A UK study of nPEP…” as written, implies that the cited study is addressing implementation of guidelines, not a communication strategy, so it does not seem to be a fair comparison.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS:

7. Abstract: It may be helpful to use the same terms throughout the abstract i.e. “communication strategy” throughout instead of “the strategy” as it is in the last sentence of the background section and the second line of the methods section of the abstract.

8. Abstract: The second sentence of the results section seems to indicate that in 2002-2005 almost 40% of people who took nPEP were not eligible to take it? As this is more an outcome of prescribing practices, might it be better to state that “there were significant decreases in the amount of nPEP prescriptions to ineligible patients” or something along those lines? This also seems like it should be a separate sentence from the patient centered outcomes of nPEP completion and post nPEP HIV testing.

9. Methods: If the “selected outcomes” are the ultimate outcomes, then why not say that in the third sentence?

10. Methods: The first sentence is confusing; it seems that a word or two might be missing. I believe I understand what the authors meant based on the abstract, but perhaps rewording here in the methods section might make it clearer.

11. Methods, Awareness of nPEP among gay men: In the second sentence perhaps rephrase to “Awareness of nPEP among gay men in Perth prior to implementation of the communication strategy was measured using…” unless this changes the meaning of the sentence. It looks like prior to the communication strategy data came from the ’02, ’04 and ’06 publications and post implementation from the ’08 and ’10 data.

12. Results, Under Immediate Outcomes: Awareness of nPEP among gay men
a. The sentence describing the increase in knowledge could give a fuller
description of the findings. From Figure 2, it does not appear that there was a
“steady” increase (which implies a linear relationship over time) but appears
instead that there was a sharp increase in knowledge between 2004 and 2006.
Would it be possible to put the percentages at the top of the columns on the
histogram? This would give readers the clearer information.

13. Results, Under Immediate Outcomes: Awareness of nPEP among health
care providers

a. I would have appreciated the inclusion of the total number of health care
providers who were sent the survey when the authors report the response rate.

14. Results Under Ultimate Outcomes: nPEP treatment practices and follow-up
testing

a. The authors give information here about the WA nPEP guidelines regarding
high-risk exposure that was not discussed previously. It might be helpful to
readers to include a sentence in the background section as to what categorizes a
high-risk exposure i.e. known to be HIV infected, or from a high risk group (and
give examples of some of the high risk groups). Then that information would not
need to be repeated here in the results.

15. Results: Also the sentence starting “Since the communication strategy has
been in place...” Maybe clarifying that these were reporting periods 2 and 3
instead would improve consistency in this paragraph?

16. Results: In the final sentence of the final paragraph of this section would it be
appropriate to state that both had “subsequent” exposures instead of “other” risk
exposures to HIV post nPEP?

17. Discussion: In the final sentence of the first paragraph: the word “steadily”
implies a similar rate of increase over each two year period, which is not
apparent in the figure. The figure shows more varied increases/decreases over
each two year period. Perhaps instead the authors could simply remove
“steadily” from the final sentence.

18. In the reference list for number 13 “follow-up” at the end of the title is missing
the second “o”

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests