Reviewer's report

Title: Preferred HIV testing services and programme characteristics among clients of a rapid HIV testing programme.

Version: 1 Date: 29 January 2013

Reviewer: Ulrich Marcus

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Promotion of HIV testing among groups and persons at increased risk for HIV infection has the potential to reduce late presentation for HIV care and increase the proportion of people infected with HIV receiving antiretroviral treatment. Different approaches to achieve greater coverage of HIV testing have been proposed. Limited information on preferences of potential clients of testing sites is available. This manuscript thus deals with a relevant issue and contributes to the discussion on how to expand testing opportunities particularly from a European perspective.

Abstract

Minor essential revisions:
1) Methods: Two times “analyzed” in one sentence.
2) Results: Make clear that 55% MSM refers to male respondents and not to the total sample.

Background

The background section describes the problem adequately.

Discretionary revision 1: Examples on what is meant by “logistical obstacles associated with traditional healthcare settings” could be included.

Methods

Attitudes of clients of a street based outreach rapid testing service in Madrid about testing sites and desirable characteristics were queried by an anonymous self-administered questionnaire.

As I understand from the manuscript, options for testing sites include options already existing and available in Spain and options which do not exist, e.g. home testing. Such a comparison is somewhat problematic, because it compares experiences with assumptions.

Major mandatory revision 1: I would suggest describing a bit more in detail which options are actually available at which conditions and what kind of services they offer. This could be done e.g. by an additional file presenting a table of the different testing sites queried in the questionnaire, describing their accessibility/availability in Spain, how they are funded, the range of services offered (additional STI testing, counseling, treatment or referral to treatment), the
conditions at which the services are offered, e.g. in terms of costs, anonymity. If such data are available, the proportion or number of annual HIV tests provided by the respective services would also be interesting information.

Results

Minor essential revisions: Some more details on how demographic and behavioural characteristics were queried would be desirable: how were engagement in sex work, partnership status and consistent condom use queried? From the data presented in table 1 the proportions reporting sex work seem quite high, raising the question how this was defined (exchange of money for sex ever? Even if it was only once or twice?) #Minor essential revision 3.

Only marital status but not partnership status (current steady partner) seem to have been queried. Using the term “single” would seem inadequate to me in this case, because it would include a larger proportion of individuals living with a steady partner, however not being married # Minor essential revision 4.

Can being married for MSM differentiate between same sex and opposite sex marriage? Since Spain is one of the few countries in Europe which introduced same sex marriage, this should be mentioned somewhere to avoid misinterpretation #Minor essential revision 5.

How was the parameter >=2 sexual partners and inconsistent condom use (last 12 months) constructed? Does it include e.g. persons who did not use condoms with their steady partner, but used condoms with non-steady partners? #Minor essential revision 6.

Discussion

Discretionary revision 2: In the discussion on which testing characteristics are most valued (table 2 and 3), one might consider that the comparatively low proportions valuing privacy and anonymity could also indicate that these characteristics are taken as granted, while the higher valued aspects of immediate results, free of charge testing, and no need to make an appointment do distinguish the rapid test mobile unit from other testing sites.

Minor essential revision 7: A certain bias of respondents has to be considered, since the questionnaire was only filled out by clients of the mobile testing unit which means by people who obviously were attracted by this testing option.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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