Reviewer's report

Title: Feasibility of an HIV self-test kit voucher program to raise community-level serostatus awareness, Los Angeles

Version: 1  Date: 9 September 2014

Reviewer: Jade Bilardi

Reviewer's report:

Reviewer's report

Title: Feasibility of an HIV self-test kit voucher program to raise community-level serostatus awareness, Los Angeles.

Date: 9th September 2014

Reviewers report:

General
This is an interesting, well written paper detailing a novel pilot study to increase HIV testing among high risk MSM in LA. I have no major revisions but would like more clarity and detail in the paper in the following areas before publication:

Abstract
I would probably clarify up front that this was a pilot study which helps explain the small sample size. "We undertook a pilot study to examine the feasibility…"

Methods
Line 91: Could you please explain for non-US readers what Walgreens is i.e. a large commercial pharmacy. You note this later in the paper but it should be explained on first use.

Line 96: IRB needs to be written in full on first use here.

Lines 97-98: I assume survey participants contacted you once they received the flyer? Could you just add one line to say that 'the flyer invited participants to contact us by telephone…'

Line 101: In what way were participants compensated? Please explain.

Line 103: Could you just add that descriptive frequencies were used to analyse survey data.

Results
Lines 107-112: Do you know why there was an increase in distribution of the vouchers between the 1st and 2nd round? Did you ask the CBO’s what accounted for this?
Lines 113-119 – What about the 3rd CBO’s distribution strategy? You’ve explained what happened with the 1st and 2nd CBO and it’s left me wondering about the 3rd...

Line 130 – Looking at Figure 1 it seems that less than 25% of participants reported being uncomfortable with the in-store process. I would be more likely to report this figure and some of the reasons why than the 35% who were comfortable especially given a further 43% gave a ‘neutral’ response for this question which indicate they weren’t that worried about the in-store process. Or 78% of participants were either comfortable or reported a neutral response about the in-store process...I would also be inclined in Line 129 to say that a further 30% of MSM were neutral in their preference for self-testing over clinic based testing or I would say that “Only 16% of MSM stated they would not prefer self-testing over clinic testing’.

Discussion

Line 149: I’m not sure if it’s the best use of words to say that CBO’s were willing to distribute large numbers of vouchers to at-risk MSM when you had one CBO distribute only 11 vouchers from 250 and the 3rd we don’t know about. They may have been willing to distribute them but from the readers point of view as it stands only one CBO distributed a large number of vouchers. You have discussed which distribution strategies worked better than others in the paragraph below which is good. With the 2nd CBO that only distributed 11 vouchers was their only opportunity to distribute vouchers through the mobile outreach vans? It just seems like a very low number for that time frame.

Line 169: Grammatical error - ‘a’ should be ‘an’ in ‘result in a…’

Line 170: Grammatical error - should be the word ‘as’ in ‘offered as a supplement…’

Line 171: Grammatical error – remove the word ‘will’ between ‘acknowledgement’ and ‘may reduce HIV prevalence’...

Line 185: This sentence does not make sense. ‘Future projects should attempt to verify survey participant’ ??

In future studies it would be really interesting to know the reasons why MSM did not redeem their vouchers....

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