Reviewer's report

Title: Barriers to Asymptomatic Screening and Other STD Services for Adolescents and Young Adults: Focus Group Discussion

Version: 1 Date: 27 May 2004

Reviewer: Thomas Farley

Reviewer’s report:

General

This is a carefully-conducted, well-described, conceptually simple project to understand the barriers to STD screening in adolescents from their perspective. Because STDs are so frequently asymptomatic, screening is essential, so it is useful to have information available in the literature on how screening can be accomplished. I have no concerns or comments on the methods.

I have three comments on the results and one on the discussion, which the authors may not need to respond to.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. I wouldn’t have expected the adolescents’ knowledge of STDs to be high, but I was struck by what appeared to be their extremely low knowledge, awareness, and access to information (e.g. schools, parents) about STDs. This group is clearly entirely in the dark about this common health problem. STD prevention programs in general have not expended much effort to provide the minimal information to this group, and maybe they should.
2. The services adolescents want are completely unsurprising, because they are exactly what the rest of us would want – services that are convenient, painless, nonjudgmental, pleasant, and confidential. Contrary to what people sometimes argue, this says adolescents aren’t that different from adults.
3. One question that the authors did not make entirely clear is what type of breaches of confidentiality the adolescents worried about. I suspect they were more worried about being recognized by another patient or community member in the waiting room than by a health care provider having records of their STD test results.
4. One big unanswered question here is whether any of this matters. If there were no barriers to screening at all, it may still be that very few adolescents come in for screening. People tend not to take action to find health problems that are asymptomatic and that (might) cause problems years later. It is the same problem faced by health professionals dealing with hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, colon cancer, etc. The authors might want to consider summarizing in a sentence what has been found in other fields about what it takes to get people (even if there are no identifiable barriers) to seek screening for hidden problems.
What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None.