Testing the Waters: Are Health Education Specialists Willing to Conduct Rapid HIV Testing?

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Abstract
Approximately 1 in 5 people with HIV are not aware of their infection; access to testing is an important part of public health. In a national study, Health Education Specialists with high HIV knowledge and favorable attitudes towards persons with HIV/AIDS were more willing to be trained to conduct rapid HIV testing (RHT).

Purpose
Grounded in the theory of reasoned action, data were collected and analyzed to study knowledge of HIV, attitudes toward HIV, and willingness to conduct rapid HIV testing among HES in the U.S.

Objectives
Evaluate the associations between knowledge of and attitudes toward persons with HIV/AIDS, and willingness to conduct RHT
Describe characteristics of health education specialists willing to conduct RHT programs

Relevant Literature
Recommendation for HIV testing expanded to all aged 15 to 65, including those at low risk (U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, 2013)
Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) mandates HIV testing be included in covered preventative screenings
Evidence suggests persons most at risk for HIV, or who may present with early infections, are not being reached (Girardi, Sabin, Monforte, 2007)

Problem
Approximately 1.1 million people are living with HIV in the U.S.; 16% are unaware of their status (CDC, 2013)
National HIV/AIDS Strategy Goals: decrease new HIV infections by 25% and increase knowledge of HIV status from 79% to 90%
More opportunities for HIV testing need to be offered to meet these goals

Procedures
National, cross-sectional survey data collected from 1,421 HES identified through the NCHEC database
Three email reminders were sent
Eligibility criteria included:
• 18 years of age and older
• Earned the Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) or Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES) credential
• Currently work (full- or part-time) in the health promotion and education field
Respondents were eligible to receive a $5 Starbucks gift card for their participation
The online survey assessed:
• HIV knowledge
• Attitudes towards persons with HIV
• Willingness to be trained and conduct RHT

Data Analysis
High HIV knowledge was defined as answering at least 12 of 13 questions correctly
Attitudes were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree
Descriptive statistics, chi-square and logistic regression analyses were conducted to assess the associations between HIV knowledge, attitudes towards persons with HIV/AIDS, and willingness to be trained and conduct RHT

Findings
Participants (n = 1,421, 15.8% response rate)
• A typical participant was a white non-Hispanic woman under 40 years of age who had been working as a HES less than 10 years, had a master’s degree, and lived in the Southern U.S.
• 70% had high HIV knowledge
• The majority had favorable attitudes towards persons with HIV/AIDS
• 80% were willing to be trained to conduct RHT

Willingness and Knowledge

Select Attitudes toward HIV Issues

Barriers to Conducting RHT

Conclusions
The majority of HES have high HIV knowledge (70%) and willingness to conduct RHT (80%)
However, some HES were lacking basic knowledge of HIV and its prevention and/or had unfavorable attitudes towards persons with HIV/AIDS
Training and implementation barriers for RHT were identified and need further investigation
The possibility of piloting HES RHT training should be considered to further evaluate the optimum ways in which this can be achieved

Limitations
Cross-sectional surveys are only used to gather information at a single point in time
Sample size lower than anticipated
Did not collect data on non-responders which may bias results

Social Change Implications
HIV is a controllable disease, but people need to be aware of their status
Because of the populations they serve, HES have the potential to play a significant role in increasing HIV testing
Increasing the opportunities for people to be tested will potentially allow for earlier diagnoses and treatment

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