

Pre and Post Test Counselling Literature Review

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Brief Summary of Emerging Trends in HIV Pre and Post Test Counselling for HIV Testing Strategies Committee

A number of shifts in the language used to describe testing and pre and post test counselling is evident from the reviewed documents. There is a move away from the term voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), (UNAIDS & WHO, 2004; WHO, 2005; WHO, 2007), toward the terms client-initiated and provider-initiated testing. This change in language becomes important in the context of providing HIV testing and counselling.

HIV guideline developers from Australia and Europe advocate for removing the term counselling and refer instead to pre test assessments and post test discussions. As the UK Guidelines state "the term 'pre-test counselling' has been used in the past to describe a person needing to see a professional with specific training and expertise in relation to HIV and/or counselling prior to undertaking an HIV test. Today the term 'pre-test discussion' is more appropriate".

The move toward increasing provider-initiated testing in health care settings such as emergency departments, primary care centres, physicians offices, etc., leads to the need for more concise and less time consuming pre and post test processes that continue to maintain the human rights of clients. As such, agencies such as the Centre for Disease Control and the WHO outline minimum standards for HIV testing and counselling.

There is agreement across multiple guidelines and agencies to support the following:

- minimum standards for HIV pre and post test standards
- increasing the provision of testing with simplification of testing processes is helpful and warranted in health care settings – the use of written materials has been demonstrated to be effective in increasing testing offers and uptake of testing by clients
- outreach, specialized sexual health, and community-based settings working with populations with greater risk of HIV transmission and acquisition continue to benefit from traditional more in depth pre and post test counselling processes
- relying solely on risk based assessments leads to missed opportunities for testing as clinicians and clients underestimate risk; additionally, clients may not disclose risks for a variety of reasons
- HIV post test counselling is a successful secondary prevention strategy for people who are diagnosed with an HIV infection and for sero-discordant couples
- HIV pre test counselling has been found to have limited success as a primary prevention strategy for reducing behaviours that may transmit HIV in HIV negative clients
- post test counselling for people found to be HIV positive is imperative
- training of health care providers is essential in supporting the provision of testing in ways that reduce stigma and increase uptake of post-testing resources if a person tests positive
- in health care settings, pre test discussions may be simplified to include at minimum:
 - voluntary and informed consent
 - sufficient information to be able to give informed consent
 - benefits and risks of testing
 - window period and relation to current and potential re-testing and potential of acute infection
 - treatment and support options available if test is positive
 - plan for receiving test results and what will happen if the test is positive
 - confidentiality and who has access to test results
 - partner notification and referral services if test is found to be positive

Potential Next Steps:

1. Development of an overall HIV pre and post test guideline that outlines simplified and more in depth testing processes - Ontario recently introduced a quick test process for physicians so following up with their experience will be helpful.
2. Develop HIV pre and post test guidelines for non-licensed health care providers.
3. Development learning options and methods that increase access of testing providers to HIV pre and post test training.
4. Follow-up with group at St. Paul's who recently implemented testing to determine HIV pre and post test processes employed.
5. Consensus regarding terminology related to HIV pre and post test processes.