

Implementation of a community based centre of HIV detection for Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) in Barcelona, Spain

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Introduction

Barcelona and his area have developed in the past decades as an attractive place for Men who have Sex with Men (MSM). Data, according to HIV surveillance of 2001-2007^{1,2}, show that almost 50% of all new cases of HIV diagnosis in this area are MSM. Also, according to Ronald Stall, PhD^{3,4}, the high HIV incidence not only depends on the individual responsibility, but also on the Community Viral Load (CVL). This means that even modest levels of sexual risk-taking can result in very high transmission rates. It is the context that matters, not the individual risk-taking behavior. In order to lower the CVL, apart from continuing individual-level intervention, other actions should be added, like those which are able to test MSM in an appropriate environment and to raise awareness about their status, to offer treatment for HIV infection (bringing them into the medical system), and to help around maintaining sexual safety over long periods of time.

In Barcelona there is only one Governmental Centre for Sexual Transmitted Infections which many MSM refuse to attend due to inadequate attention of medical staff, sometimes with moralistic and homophobic attitudes. Therefore, Projecte dels NOMS-Hispanosida has implemented in 2006 a community based centre for MSM, called BCN Checkpoint, dedicated to early detection of HIV and syphilis and to assure better care.

Methodology

Counselors of BCN Checkpoint are all gay and most of them are HIV positive. This guarantees that MSM will have a space, in the middle of the gay area, where they can talk openly about their sexuality, risk perceptions and sexual safety, while they can do a rapid HIV and syphilis test (Determine™ HIV-1/2 and Determine™ Syphilis TP). Our key points are peer counselors, introduction of rapid HIV and Syphilis tests, and a specific outreach to our community through campaigns and presence of our volunteers in clubs, discos, bathhouses and other gay venues.

The Voluntary Testing and Counseling (VTC) is anonymous and takes up around 1 hour.

Men with an HIV positive result, confirmed by a Western Blot test, will receive emotional support, and will be offered an appointment in one of Barcelona's HIV medical units. At the same time they will be given the possibility to join another program of Projecte dels NOMS-Hispanosida, called INFOTRAT. This peer-led program, which is exclusively for people living with HIV and AIDS, has two goals: to meet other people in the same situation, and to learn more about HIV/AIDS and their treatment and management.

Men with an HIV negative result will receive counseling in order to maintain sexual safety, and will be invited to repeat the tests every 6 or 12 months. Counseling offered by BCN Checkpoint includes education to avoid discriminatory attitudes towards HIV positive men within the MSM community.

Specific Campaigns



Volunteers



Results

TABLE 1

Number of tests performed	
Total of persons attended	951
Total of HIV tests	1098
Total of Syphilis tests	904

TABLE 2

	Number of persons		
	Total	Positive	%
That received an HIV test	938	37	3,94%
That received a Syphilis test	770	25	3,25%

TABLE 3

	HIV-Syphilis coinfection		
	Total	coinfected	%
HIV+ tested for Syphilis	28	8	28,57%
Syphilis+ tested for HIV	22	8	36,36%

TABLE 4

Data from Public Health Agency of Barcelona in 2007		
	Total	%
HIV cases reported	349	100%
HIV cases reported in MSM	158	45,30%

The 37 HIV cases detected in BCN Checkpoint would be comparable to 23,74% of all HIV cases reported in MSM in Barcelona

TABLE 5

	Distribution of HIV cases by age groups		
	Total	HIV Positive	%
< 25 years	144	4	2,78%
25 - 35 years	464	16	3,45%
35 - 45 years	261	12	4,60%
> 45 years	69	5	7,25%
Total	938	37	

TABLE 6

	Distribution of HIV cases by procedence		
	Total	HIV Positive	%
Spain	574	15	2,61%
Rest of Europe	140	4	2,86%
North America	7	0	0%
Latin America	202	17	8,42%
Africa	8	1	12,50%
Asia	2	0	0%
Australia and New Zealand	5	0	0%
Total	938	37	

Conclusions

- The MSM community has well accepted the concept of BCN Checkpoint, as demonstrated by the satisfactory results from a survey conducted among the clients.
- Gay NGOs, patient-based organizations, as well as clubs, bars, magazines and other gay business have shown interest in providing support and collaboration to maintain the project.
- Health Authorities should provide adequate funding to ensure the continuity of BCN Checkpoint's good results.
- This intervention model can work for lowering the Community Viral Load. A community approach for VTC gives better results and is more cost/effective than an approach to general public.

Next steps

We will consolidate our work and extend our experience to other urban areas in Spain with significant MSM communities.

Furthermore BCN Checkpoint will start in 2008 a prospective cohort study among HIV negative MSM, so our community may have their own figures of HIV incidence and does not have to depend on the figures of other European Countries.

References

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Further Information

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