

The STI outpatient clinic online- The use and efficacy of a full-scale STI & HIV testing applications online

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Background: Sexual Transmitted Infection (STI) are on the rise among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. To lower the threshold for routine STI testing among asymptomatic MSM an online STI and HIV test-service was developed for these cities.

Methods: Through a national site for the sexual health of MSM, mantotman.nl, men can arrange anonymously and free-of-charge a complete test package for Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis and HIV at an accredited testing lab without the need to visit a doctor for a referral. Results can be later obtained online and men found positive are referred to the STI clinic for treatment. To determine the usage and efficacy of the intervention, information on usage, test completion, and results were gathered for 11 months. To assess usability and acceptability, an online questionnaire was offered after clients obtained the test results. We compiled 4 items to construct a scale for "usability" and 4 items for the scale "acceptability". All items targeted different dimensions of both constructs using a 5 point scale: 1= completely disagree to 5 = completely agree.

Results: The online test service received 4818 visits of which 3555 were unique visitors. In total the visitors completed 1406 intakes, 1130 were referred to the laboratories to get tested and 276 were directly referred to the STI clinic. Of the men referred to the laboratories, 47% (532/1130) got tested, of which 16% (85/532) did that after receiving an email reminder. Of the tested men 96% (509/532) obtained their test results online and 17% (84/500) had one or more positive test result. In Amsterdam 19% tested positive compared to 15% (260/1701) at the STI clinic. Almost all men who tested positive (99%, 83/84) visited the STI clinic for treatment. On average 10 days passed between referral download and testing, and additional 9 days between testing and watching the results online. On Usability the online service scored a 4.5 (cronbachs alpha .875) and a 3.9 on acceptability (cronbachs alpha .795).

Conclusion: Online STI testing is feasible as a relatively high rate of the referred men got tested, and compliance with test procedures was high. The users also graded the service high on usability and acceptability. The service proved effective in detecting MSM with asymptomatic infections since the percentage of positive diagnoses was higher (not stat. sig.) than at the STI clinic.