

Using Technology to Streamline Client Data Collection and Improve HIV Test Counseling

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Project Description

This pilot study will determine the acceptability and translatability of PalmPal, an innovative structural intervention we designed to improve the process of HIV test counseling. PalmPal is a ten minute risk assessment questionnaire that is self administered by the client using a handheld computer just prior to the test session. The proposed study will recruit a representative sample of 40 test clients from three test clinics to conduct six focus groups.

The study will address two main research questions:

1. Is PalmPal usable and acceptable across a variety of test client populations?
2. What are clients' perceptions about the potential of PalmPal to enhance the testing process?

To address the first question, participants will complete the PalmPal questionnaire at the start of the focus group. To address the second question, the focus group discussions will explore client experiences with a range of counseling strategies and the ways that PalmPal might enhance the session. The demographic, risk, and testing characteristics of participants collected on the PalmPal device will provide valuable context for interpreting participant comments about testing preferences and experiences from the focus group discussion.

The proposed study will lay the groundwork for two future research proposals:

1. To expand the scope of the PalmPal intervention to include targeted prevention education for test clients
2. To test the effectiveness of PalmPal as a structural intervention both by itself and combined with face-to-face test counseling

Significance

PalmPal has the potential to revolutionize the way HIV risk assessment and test counseling are conducted in California. While our ongoing evaluation of the PalmPal pilot with men who have sex with men has demonstrated its effectiveness in streamlining the structure of test counseling, the degree to which this intervention can be translated to other populations of test clients remains to be seen.

