

A Structural Intervention to Improve HIV Test Counseling

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Project Description

This study has three components:

1. Describe the strategies HIV rapid test counselors use to manage multiple roles during the test session.

Multiple roles include: obtaining the client's informed consent, explaining the meaning of the test results, completing paperwork, assessing the client's risk and eliciting the client's particular concerns and reasons for testing. We found that filling out the risk assessment form during the session limited the scope of the discussion. Counselors spent up to one third of the session filling out paperwork. Follow-up interviews revealed that clients were not forthcoming to counselors about their risks.

2. Develop a computer assisted survey that is self-administered by the client before they see the counselor (PalmPal).

In order to eliminate the data collection tasks during the session, we collaborated with the San Francisco Department of Public Health and Magnet, a CBO in San Francisco, to develop a PalmPal survey. Clients report more risk on the computer than they do with the counselor and enter the session ready to talk about their risk. Counselors do not have access to individual client data and must use open-ended questions to get to know each client's situation. By streamlining data collection in this way, counselors can devote more time to a client-centered discussion about the client's current situation and develop a future risk reduction plan (www.palmpal.org/faq.html).

3. Enhance counselor training and supervision using time charts.

To understand how counselors structure the session, we developed time charts as a tool to compare the sequence and distribution of tasks in time across many test sessions. This analysis allows us to compare different ways counselors structure their time with the client and how they transition from one role to another, for example, how they switch from asking about the number of partners for the risk assessment form to asking an open ended question about the decision to use condoms. During the follow-up interviews, participants are asked to listen to the session recording, stopping at the role transitions to elicit comments on the specific strategies used in the session.

We collaborated with David Woods, a software developer at University of Wisconsin, Madison to add time charts as a feature of Transana, a qualitative research analysis software. We are testing the feasibility of having counselors record and analyze their own sessions as a form of self-supervision and continuing education (see www.palmpal.org/transana.pdf).

Interesting Findings

- The PalmPal Intervention has been implemented at three HIV testing agencies in San Francisco which collectively conduct the majority of HIV tests in the City: Magnet, Forensic AIDS Project (SF Jails), UCSF AIDS Health Project .

Project Website: www.palmpal.org

