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Knowledge and Awareness of STD Risk Perception of MSM in Philadelphia

Timothy Chou and Dr. Nancy Brisbon

There has been a rise in incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), in particularly in men who have sex with men (MSM). MSM were 106x as likely to have primary or secondary syphilis as compared to men who exclusively had sex with women (MSW). MSM account for large portion of antimicrobial resistant gonorrhea diagnoses and saw a 151% increase in incidence while compared to a 31.7% increase in MSW. This study examines what MSM in Philadelphia know about transmission methods and outcomes of syphilis and gonorrhea to better understand MSM risk perception of these diseases. A multiple-choice test was distributed to a total of 87 men in Philadelphia at the William Way center as well as at men who visited the Thomas Jefferson booth at Outfest on October 7th, 2018. The survey found that only about half of men knew about symptoms of the diseases, while a third knew about long term consequences of syphilis. At least 75% of men were aware of the behaviors that can result in transmission, though fewer were aware that oral sex is an infection method. The majority of men knew what PrEP is and that it does not prevent syphilis, but only a fifth of responders took the drug. Education can be focused to educate MSM about symptoms and long-term consequences of syphilis and gonorrhea. Future studies can investigate why MSM are not taking PrEP despite knowing about it. Through education, safe sex behaviors will be encouraged and halt the rising rates of STDs.