Facility Optimization: Use of Safe Spaces to Increase Access to HIV Testing Services among MSM in Kisumu County, Kenya

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BACKGROUND

Key populations (KPs) in Kenya have a substantially increased risk of HIV compared to the general population. Though Kenya has embraced the use of safe spaces within drop-in centers (DICs) as a model of providing HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services to KPs, gaps remain in the use of the centers. The number of KP members visiting the DICs has been low, with an even further drop in the number who take up HIV testing services (HTS) at the DIC.

INCREASING RESPONSE

To bridge this gap, the Linkages across the Continuum of HIV Services for Key Populations Affected by HIV (LINKAGES) project in Kenya—led by FH 360 and supported by USAID and PEPFAR—implemented a rapid response initiative (RRI). This is a short-term initiative with the aim of accelerating results for specific program areas.

BUILD UP ATTENDANCE

The purpose of the RRI was to sensitize peer educators (PEs) in understanding the services at the DIC and to enhance attendance and uptake of service by them and their peers at one of the DICs in Kisumu County, Kenya.

METHODS

The following steps were taken for the intervention.

AT THE START

• The program conducted a sensitization meeting with the PEs to discuss their role in mobilization at the DIC and how to increase uptake of services, especially HTS.

• In this meeting, an analysis of data was done for the men who have sex with men (MSM)—per peer educator—who had visited the DIC and received a testing service and those who had not visited. This analysis formed the basis of the targeted mobilization.

• The PEs then discussed some of the barriers expressed by their peers in accessing services and visiting the DIC.

• Each PE was assigned a specific day of the week to be at the DIC and mobilize their peers to come for services there. The PEs used their peer calendars as reference for reaching out to their cohorts, especially those who had never come to the DIC.

• Contact was made through telephone conversations, social media, and one-on-one interactions at hot spots and other soliciting events.

UPON ARRIVAL

• Once at the DIC, the KP members were provided with health education and offered HTS.

• In consultation with KP members, the DIC implemented thematic days. Each of these days was associated with a specific, unique activity. The themes included pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) days, coffee Mondays, and movie Fridays. The DIC staff ensured that on these days, health education and an opportunity to test for HIV were provided, in addition to the theme activity.

RESULTS

The campaign was conducted from August to September 2018.

• Fifteen PEs were involved in the campaign.

• A total of 606 MSM mobilized by the PEs, 582 (96%) received an HIV test.

• A total of 121 (21%) reported having received an HIV test for the first time.

• Four percent were newly diagnosed with HIV, which is a four-fold increase from the same period the previous year.

• Movie Fridays were the most popular of the theme days; 30% of the total tested received the test after watching a movie.

CONCLUSIONS

Use of safe spaces at the DIC greatly increases access and uptake of HTS and identification of HTS-naïve MSM. This was demonstrated by the average increase of peers, from between 10 to 15 peers per week to 25 to 35 peers per week accessing the DIC during the RRI period.

OTHER KEY FACTORS

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