The Impact of a Statewide Media Campaign on Rapid HIV Testing in New Jersey: 2004

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ABSTRACT

A 2 million dollar campaign for rapid HIV was conducted in the summer of 2004 in New Jersey. The media campaign included TV ads, radio spots, billboards and bus signs. The campaign emphasized the importance and availability of testing. This report will assess the effects of the campaign on testing levels and on the use of rapid tests.

Publicly funded counseling and testing sites provided weekly logs of phone calls and people who came into sites as a result of the campaign. These logs contained the number of individuals who were tested as a result of the program by rapid or conventional test and the number of positive tests.

A total of 1,501 phone calls were reported and 1,139 in-person visits to programs as a result of the campaign. Of the individuals who visited programs because of the campaign, 1,137 were tested. Of these, 977 received a rapid test and the remaining were given a non-rapid test. There were 17 confirmed positive rapid tests resulting from this campaign and one additional non-rapid positive test. During an earlier, equivalent time period, the counseling and treatment programs in the study performed 2,594 HIV tests. During the media campaign, the sites performed a total of 3,689 tests (including those tests not attributable to the campaign). This represents a 42.2% increase in the number of tests. There was an increase in rapid tests performed from 1,345 to 3,166 (a 135.4% increase) and a decrease in conventional tests from 1,249 to 523 during the two consecutive periods. A total of 63 positive tests were found during the media campaign as a result of rapid tests and 9 from non-rapid tests. In the earlier period, there were 38 positive results from rapid tests and 31 from non-rapid tests.

The media campaign appears to have substantially increased the overall number of persons tested for HIV infection. A major effect of the campaign was to increase the relative proportion of rapid tests. Although there was an increase in the number of positives found in the campaign period, the major finding was that the percentage of positive tests found through rapid testing was much higher during the media campaign period, which may have led to a higher percentage of positives who received their results.

INTRODUCTION

The media campaign was designed to encourage testing for HIV in any of the available sites in the state and consisted of:

- Television ads
- Radio spots
- Billboards
- Bus signs

The material emphasized the importance of testing and the availability of sites where testing could take place. Two million dollars were expended on the campaign. There was considerable interest in

- whether the campaign had a positive effect on the numbers of HIV tests performed, and
- whether the use of rapid tests, in particular, was increased through the media campaign.

METHODS

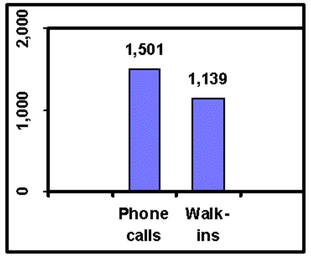
All publicly funded counseling and testing sites in the state submitted weekly logs to the New Jersey Division of HIV/AIDS Services that contained:

- Number of phone calls received during the week that were related to the media campaign
- Number of people who came into the site as a result of the media campaign
- Of the persons who came into the site as a result of the media campaign, the number who received an HIV test
- Of the HIV tests given as a result of the media campaign, the number that were conventional and the number that were rapid tests
- The number of conventional tests given as a result of the campaign that were positive and the number of rapid tests given as a result of the campaign that were positive

RESULTS

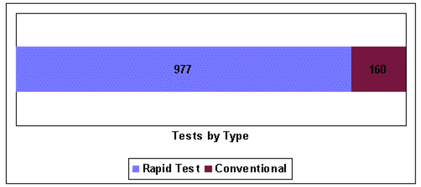
A total of 1,501 phone calls and 1,139 in-person visits resulting from the campaign were reported by publicly funded counseling and testing sites during the 11 weeks of the campaign (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Phone Calls and In-Person Visits
Resulting from Media Campaign
New Jersey, 2004



All but two of the persons who walked into counseling and treatment sites as a result of the media campaign received an HIV test. The vast majority of these (977) received a rapid test and the remainder were given a conventional test (Chart 2).

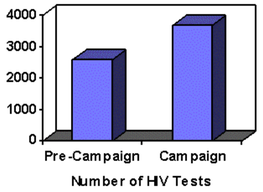
Chart 2
Number of Rapid and Conventional Tests
Resulting From the Media Campaign
New Jersey, 2004



Of the 1,137 persons who went into publicly funded counseling and testing centers to be tested because of the media campaign, there were 17 confirmed positive results from rapid tests and one additional positive result from a conventional test.

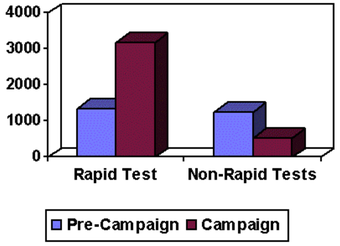
An overall increase in HIV testing occurred in the publicly funded sites during the time frame of the campaign. During the time period immediately preceding the campaign and equivalent in length to the campaign, the programs reporting under the media campaign performed a total of 2,594 HIV tests. These same programs performed 3,689 HIV tests during the media campaign, which represents a 42.2% increase in the number of tests (Chart 3).

Chart 3
Total HIV Tests Performed in Period
Before and During Media Campaign
New Jersey, 2004



During the media campaign, rapid tests performed increased from 1,345 to 3,166 (a 135.4% increase over the earlier period) while conventional tests decreased from 1,249 to 523 (Chart 4).

Chart 4
Change in Type of HIV Tests
Before and During Media Campaign
New Jersey, 2004



A total of 63 positive results were found from rapid tests during the media campaign, compared to 38 positive readings from rapid tests found during the pre-campaign period. During the same time periods, 9 positive results were found from conventional tests during the campaign period and 31 during the pre-campaign time span. Thus, 87.5 percent of positives found during the media campaign were results of rapid tests, while only 55.1 percent of positive tests resulted from rapid testing during the pre-campaign periods (Charts 5 and 6).

Chart 5
Positive HIV Tests by Type of Test
During Media Campaign
New Jersey, 2004

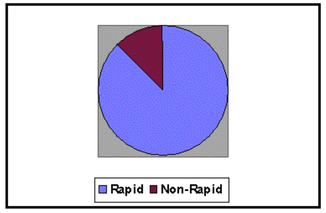
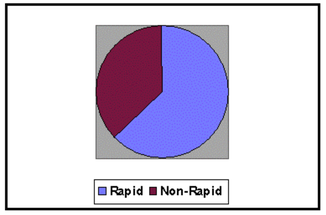


Chart 6
Positive HIV Tests by Type of Test
During Pre-Campaign Period
New Jersey, 2004



CONCLUSIONS

The media campaign substantially increased the overall number of persons tested for HIV infection. More importantly, the campaign served to increase the relative proportion of rapid tests given in the publicly funded clinics. The percentage of positive tests found from rapid tests during the campaign period was much higher than that found during the pre-campaign time period. Because persons receiving a rapid test are much more likely to get the results than those tested with a conventional test, the media campaign may have had the effect of leading to a higher percentage of positives who received their results.