



St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital, Center for Comprehensive Care

Strategies for Routinizing Rapid HIV Testing and Linkage to Care throughout St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center

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www.centerforcare.org

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Laminated signs advertising rapid HIV testing are posted above every bed in the Emergency Department

October, 2004 - May, 2006

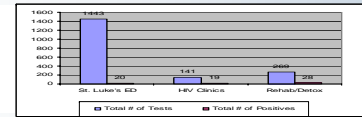
ABSTRACT

In 2004, St. Luke's Hospital (located near Harlem in New York City) became one of the first medical centers in the U.S. to begin offering Emergency Department (ED) patients a free, rapid HIV test. Building on the success of that pilot project, with the goal of routinizing HIV testing, the rapid testing program was expanded to include all areas of both St. Luke's and Roosevelt Hospitals. This program aims to identify new cases of HIV in the earliest stages of infection and to link all who test positive into specialized care.

Since the program's inception, the number and percentage of patients tested have increased each year. 2759 eligible ED patients (4.8%) were tested from January through October in 2008, an increase from the 1993 patients (3.9%) tested during that time frame in 2007. Hospital-wide, a total of 6515 patients were tested from January through October 2008; 5495 were tested during those months in 2007.

This program, funded by Public Health Solutions, has had success with identifying people who did not know that they were HIV positive and linking them into care. Of the 115 patients who tested positive from January through October 2007, 66% were linked to care at our HIV clinics or another healthcare provider. (61% were new diagnoses.) Of the 125 people who tested positive from January to October 2008, 82% were linked into care. (53% were new diagnoses.) The large percentage of known positives who got tested was unexpected. We are working to address this ongoing challenge by encouraging staff to order a Western Blot test (instead of a rapid test) to confirm a patient's HIV status.

In the first few years of the program, rapid HIV testing was limited to only a few areas of the hospital. In St. Luke's Emergency Department, patients and those who were not registered could get a free rapid test by an HIV Counselor, but only on non-holiday weekdays from 9:00 am to 11:00 pm. Another HIV Counselor also offered testing to all patients in Roosevelt Hospital's inpatient Rehabilitation unit and St. Luke's Detoxification unit, as well as at the HIV Clinics (run by the Center for Comprehensive Care) at both hospitals.



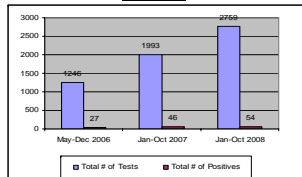
Informed Consent forms and colorful signs promoting rapid HIV testing are also at triage desks in the ED waiting rooms

Emergency Department

STRATEGIES:

In June, 2006, the program was changed to allow rapid HIV testing to be available in the ED at all times. Patients are first offered an HIV test during initial triage. Signs advertising the test are posted above every bed and throughout the waiting rooms. Physicians offer the test to patients as well, and wear buttons to promote the availability of this service. Doctors were trained and encouraged (through incentives such as a \$300 gift certificate given to the resident who ordered the most tests per month) to order the test using blood 24 hours per day. Patients are given blood test results in under two hours. During standard business hours doctors can also electronically order the test using an oral swab. This is administered by an on-site HIV Counselor, who is also responsible for re-stocking consent forms, and making sure those who test preliminary positive receive a confirmatory test and are linked to follow-up care.

RESULTS:

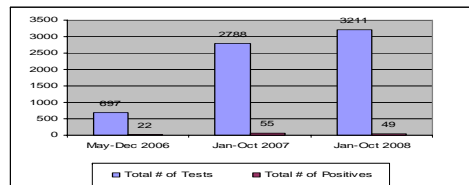


Inpatient and Outpatient Medical Units

STRATEGIES:

At the same time, the program was expanded hospital-wide, including all inpatient units, OB/GYN clinics, and other outpatient medical clinics in both hospitals. Through numerous in-services, posting of flyers, and internal computerized bulletins, staff from the Center for Comprehensive Care trained doctors in these units how to obtain written informed consent, order rapid blood tests by computer, and trained nurses how to administer oral swabs. The HIV Counselor keeps each unit stocked with consent forms and test kits, as well as makes sure flyers advertising the test are placed on walls and bulletin boards within each unit for both staff and patients to see. In the case of a positive result, physicians can contact either the HIV Counselor or inpatient HIV Social Workers to help them inform patients and link them into care.

RESULTS:

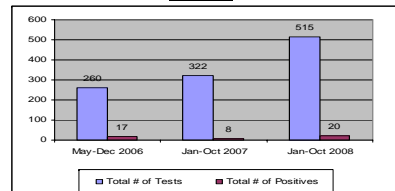


HIV Clinics

STRATEGIES:

In 2006, Social Workers at the HIV clinics in both hospitals were trained to offer free, walk-in rapid tests. The availability of this service was promoted to the public by placing advertisements in local newspapers, spots on various radio stations, as well as PSA's on air cable TV channels. Also, several times throughout the year, HIV positive Peer Educators set up tables in each hospital's lobby to hand out educational materials, clinic brochures, and advertise free testing. Linkage to care is obviously made easier if the test is performed in the HIV clinic. However, as in the other areas of the hospital, ensuring patients keep follow-up appointments is often difficult because of factors such as unstable housing, substance use, and various other psycho-social barriers to accessing care.

RESULTS:



Inpatient Detoxification and Rehabilitation Units

STRATEGIES:

An HIV Counselor at St. Luke's Detoxification and Roosevelt's Rehabilitation Units runs weekly HIV prevention groups and offers all patients rapid tests, as well as links those who test positive into care with the same strategies used in other units: Making clinic appointments for those who test preliminary positive, contacting clinic Social Workers and HIV positive Peer Educators to come meet with them, giving people clinic tours, phoning to remind them of appointments, as well as calling and sending letters if they miss their initial appointment. Additionally, counselors work with patients to help them notify their sexual and needle-sharing partners so they will know that they should get tested too.

RESULTS:

