

# PoCT (Point of Care Testing) HIV/STI Testing at After-Hours SOPV (Sex on Premises Venues) Theme Parties

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Sexual 'theme parties' have become more popular among MSM (men who have sex with men) over time. They are typically attended by more 'sexually adventurous' MSM and associated with alcohol/other drug use. These factors may constitute heightened risks for HIV/STI transmission. Operating a regular, rapid HIV/STI testing service during theme parties (within a high-risk setting), represents a novel approach to health promotion and more accessible testing. This research sought to establish 'proof of concept', and evaluate the uptake and feasibility/acceptability of routine HIV/STI testing for MSM in a novel outreach environment.

**Method:** Weekly HIV/STI PoCT (Alere, UniGold) was offered by trained peer-testers on Friday and Saturday nights from 9pm-midnight, in a private room at the venue. Patrons requesting tests were asked to complete an evaluation survey after testing. Verbal consent was provided and ethics approval was obtained for the evaluation. The testing processes were per TGA guidelines.

**Results:** To date, 122 MSM have participated in PoCT (majority identified as 'gay'; average age 36, range: 18-66) over a six month period (indicating 4 reactive syphilis tests; nil reactive HIV); recruited via information within the venue and social media). Salient findings indicate: All (100%) participants reportedly felt comfortable with the community outreach testing; 96% reported peer-led testing would *increase* the frequency of testing; 20% 'would not have had a test' if the service did not exist; and 34% reported to have 'never had' an HIV test. Further qualitative comments reflecting acceptability included: accessibility; feeling comfortable; easy and quick testing—conducted by friendly and 'relatable' staff members. Secondary analyses regarding socio-demographic features associated with testing patterns, substance use, sexual activity and harm reduction strategies will also be highlighted.

**Conclusion:** This project has demonstrated acceptability and feasibility within a key MSM sub-group—regarding novel health promotion delivered by a peer-based PLHIV organisation. Implications for further health promotion efforts and future research with sexually adventurous MSM will be discussed in light of main findings. Rapid PoCT technologies foster opportunistic HIV/STI testing uptake amongst MSM in a high-risk setting, and create opportunities for qualitative follow-up; the research will inform the lens through which drug use among gay men and other MSM is contextualised within a sexual context.

## INTRODUCTION

### Previous Research

- Health promotion in novel environments has been demonstrated to be acceptable to members of the target group (hard to reach sexually adventurous cohort) and reduce barriers to accessing services (Daskalakis et al., 2009; Grov, 2012; McInnes et al., 2011; Mullens et al., 2009a;b).
- Research has demonstrated that MSM attending non-conventional HIV testing locations may have higher rates of condomless sex than those attending HIV screening as well as a conduit towards continued, routine and more sustainable HIV screening (e.g., self-testing; see Ryan et al., 2016).

### Purpose of Study

- The project was established to address unmet health and screening needs regarding HIV testing among more sexually adventurous MSM, whilst attending late night theme parties at SOPV, with a specific focus on reported co-morbid substance use and sexual activity.
- A secondary aim is to determine the acceptability and feasibility of using health promotion outreach and PoCTs to reach stigmatised highly sexually adventurous men, including a more comprehensive STI/HIV screen
- A further aim is to better understand current patterns regarding substance use within the context of sexual activity, to inform future work in health promotion, harm reduction, community/clinical interventions and relevant research.

## METHOD

### Participants

- Men aged over 18 whom engage in sex with other men (MSM) and are attending SOPV.

### Participant Recruitment

- Weekly HIV/STI PoCT (Alere, UniGold) was offered by trained peer testers on Friday and Saturday nights from 9pm until midnight, in a private room at the venue.
- Recruited via information within the venue and social media.

### Testing

- Staff (peer testers) from Queensland Positive People provide health promotion and point-of-care testing at an SOPV venue in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.
- Staff provided point of care HIV and other tests, with results in 20 minutes.

- Participants are also able to engage the staff in discussion regarding health promotion and risk-reduction strategies that included access to PEP and PrEP.

### Procedure

- The testing processes were conducted per TGA guidelines.
- Patrons requesting tests were asked to complete an evaluation survey after testing.
- Verbal consent was obtained.

### Ethical Considerations

- This project has been approved by the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (H16REA175).
- Participation was voluntary & anonymous, & participants provided informed consent.

Table 1

### Survey Responses

	1. SA	2. A	3. U	4. D	5. SD
Q1. I was comfortable with today's pre/post-test discussion	104	14			
Q2. A peer-led testing service like this venue outreach clinic would increase my HIV testing frequency	88	25	3	1	
Q3. I would have had a HIV test regardless of whether the venue outreach clinic was available	34	40	21	11	7
Q4. I am comfortable with community HIV testing from an outreach venue	25	31	2		
Q5. I commonly use party drugs whilst attending venues/theme parties?	6	10	8	16	34
Q6. If I was drunk or high, I would be less likely to use condoms with any partner	19	33	22	15	15
Q7. I would be willing to take a daily pill to prevent HIV (PrEP)	58	28	19	8	1
Q8. Sometimes, I get drunk or high to forget about HIV/STI risks	13	26	6	24	28
Q9. HIV is a manageable health condition	46	58	7	4	1
Q10. I would be willing to have condom less sex if my sexual partner had an undetectable HIV viral load	23	13	44	18	12
Q11. I engage in strategies to try to avoid getting HIV	48	45	9	5	2
Q12. I was satisfied with my HIV testing experience	100	18			

## RESULTS (Preliminary)

To date (data collection/analysis remains ongoing):

- 122 MSM have participated in PoCT (majority identified as 'gay')
- Average age 36, range: 18-66
- 4 reactive syphilis tests

Main Findings:

- All (100%) participants reportedly felt comfortable with the community outreach testing
- 96% reported peer-led testing would increase the frequency of testing
- 20% 'would not have had a test' if the service did not exist
- 34% reported to have 'never had' an HIV test

Further qualitative comments from 'early adopters' of this project reflect acceptability: *accessibility; feeling comfortable; easy and quick testing - conducted by friendly and 'relatable' staff members.*

## CONCLUSIONS

This project has demonstrated acceptability and feasibility within a key MSM sub-group regarding novel health promotion delivered by a peer-based people living with HIV (PLHIV) organisation.

- Low cost model of testing encourages opportunistic testing that yields STI diagnoses and opportunities for health promotion regarding sexual activity, PrEP, substance use, etc.
- Further testing in SOPVs is merited and represents a public health opportunity.
- Findings contrast with other literature that SOPVs are a place for sex (and not health promotion), possibly explained by a peer-delivered testing model - suggesting there is opportunity for cultural sensitive health promotion in sexualised venues such as SOPVs.
- Future research will include additional STI screening with Genexpert and qualitative interviews with patrons and peer testers, to triangulate evaluation findings.
- Rapid PoCT technologies foster opportunistic testing among MSM in a high-risk setting, and create opportunities for follow-up.
- Further examination anticipated of characteristics of those whom may most benefit from POCT at SOPVs (e.g., never tested, those who would not have tested unless at SOPV).
- Future research via this project will also inform the lens through which drug use among MSM is contextualised within a sexual context.

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