

Mobile Phone Technology Improves Delivery of Male Circumcision for HIV Prevention Services

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Background

In the Iringa region of Tanzania male circumcision for HIV prevention services were launched in September 2009, and since that date more than 25,000 males have received services. In October 2010, program managers from Jhpiego – an affiliate of Johns Hopkins University, under the Maternal and Child Health (MCHIP) program with funding from USAID through PEPFAR, and local regional officials sought new ways to communicate with the population of Iringa as MC services were scaling-up to an ever increasing number of communities and sites. Additionally, as the team prepared to launch the second Iringa campaign (November/December 2010), the program looked to improve client education and compliance with post-operative instructions (caring for the incision, follow-up visits to health facilities, complying with 6-week abstinence requirement). To accomplish this, the program embraced the use of a free text messaging (SMS) services.



Methods

Text to Change set up a toll-free SMS number, which was available on all mobile phone networks in the country, was established and promoted to potential MC clients in Iringa region in conjunction with the implementation of the November/December 2010 campaign. Clients could dial TOHARA (*CIRCUMCISION*) to receive information on the benefits of MC for HIV prevention, and/or WAPI (*WHERE*) to find out where circumcision was currently being offered in a community near them. Additionally, nurses working in the post-operative area asked newly circumcised clients for their mobile phones and helped them to dial BAADA (*AFTER*) which triggered a series of eight messages timed to be delivered over six weeks to remind them about return visits, wound care, abstinence for the healing period, and other issues. “Hits” to all three of these key words were analyzed to learn if there is a relation between those seeking information about circumcision and those who received services, and general uptake of the SMS service.

Results

12,056 SMS hits dialled by 4,954 unique users were sent to the three key words (TOHARA, WAPI, BAADA) during the three weeks of the November/December 2010 MC campaign in Iringa. Using a Chi Square analysis the data show that dialling TOHARA (for general information about MC) is not strongly associated with having gone for circumcision, while dialling WAPI (to find out where MC services are located) has a statistically significant association. These results may be influenced by limitations of mobile phone use. For example, a parent may dial WAPI to find out where MC is being offered, but the son might not have a mobile phone in the post-operative room on which to dial BAADA – so the analysis would not be able to show him as a user of WAPI who received MC.

Conclusions

The high uptake of SMS inquires suggests that the use of mobile phone technology has the ability to increase access to MC for HIV prevention services. The data show that individuals who were seeking general information about circumcision were not necessarily motivated to seek services, while there is a strong association between those who SMSed to find out where MC services were available and those who were actually circumcised.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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