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Authors

White, Douglas AE
Scribner, Alicia N.

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Opt-Out HIV Screening in an Urban Emergency Department: Implementation of the New Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines

Douglas A. E. White, MD
Alicia N. Scribner, MPH

Alameda County Medical Center

Background: Opt-out HIV screening has been shown to increase testing rates when compared to opt-in HIV screening in certain clinical settings. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend providing opt-out HIV screening in emergency departments (ED) where the HIV prevalence exceeds 0.1%.

Objectives: To determine the feasibility and yield of integrating opt-out HIV screening into the general consent process for ED services.

Methods: Prospective study in an urban, academic ED. Beginning in August 2007, opt-out HIV screening was integrated into the general ED services consent form. Patients were ineligible for HIV screening if they were <15 years old, medically unstable, had language barriers, or were otherwise unable to consent for ED care. After being notified by registration staff that HIV testing may be performed, eligible patients could opt-out of testing by signing the general consent form under the statement "I do not want to be tested for HIV." Testing was performed by a triage-based HIV tester weekdays 7:30am-8:30pm, using the OraQuick ADVANCE Rapid HIV test on oral specimens.

Results: During the first four months of the study, 23,492 age-eligible patients were registered. 4,943 (21.0%) were ineligible for screening, 12,250 (52.2%) opted-out, and 6,299 (26.8%) did not opt-out of screening. HIV screening tests were performed in 3,531 (56.1%) of the patients not opting-out. Three thousand five hundred ten tests (99.4%) were negative, 20 (0.6%) were preliminary positive and one (0.03%) was invalid. Four patients admitted to prior knowledge of HIV infection.

Conclusions: Opt-out HIV screening using registration personnel and supplemental testing staff is feasible. Although acceptance rates of opt-out testing are lower than expected, the absolute number of patients tested monthly exceeds those of other published ED HIV testing studies. Additional studies should aim to identify the reasons why patients opt-out of HIV testing.