



Testing the waters: Rates of HIV testing in an Irish Emergency Department

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Background

The CDC recommends testing patients for HIV using an “opt-out” approach – meaning that absence of dissent is taken as consent. Though there is a paucity of recent guidelines on consent for HIV testing in Ireland, Medical Council guidelines recommend that informed consent be taken prior to doing an HIV test. This service evaluation assessed HIV testing at a major teaching hospital Emergency Department (ED), as well as knowledge, attitudes and practices of healthcare workers (HCW) around it.

Methodology

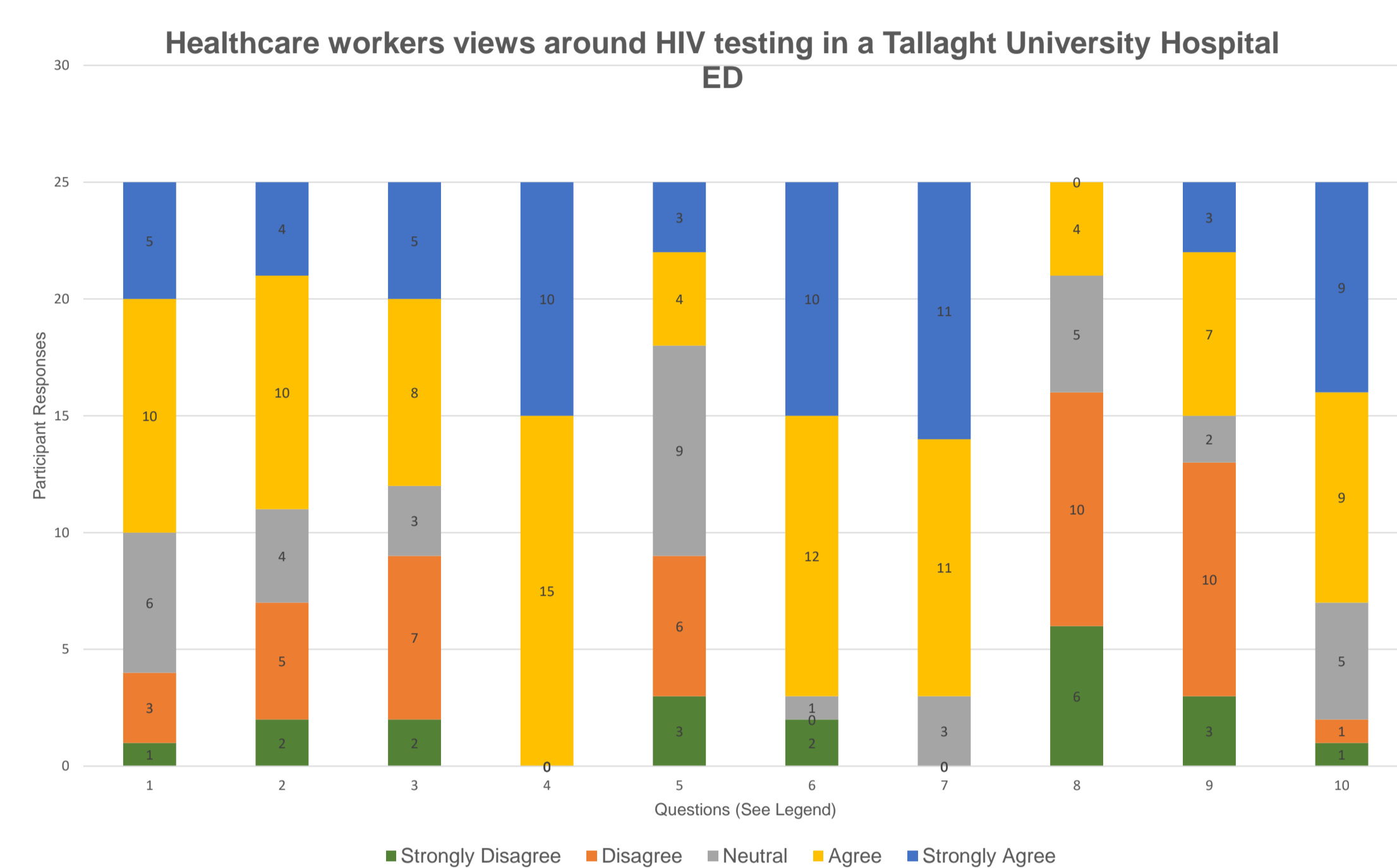
The project was commenced after approval by our institution's Quality Improvement office. It aimed to review the number and results of HIV tests carried out via the ED of our institution over one year from 01 June 2023 to 01 June 2024, sourcing the data from the microbiology lab.

We also evaluated the knowledge and attitudes of HCW about HIV testing and barriers, if any, to the testing. Accordingly, 25 HCW completed a questionnaire consisting of ten questions to be rated on a five point Likert scale. Healthcare workers on duty in the Emergency Department were randomly selected and approached to complete the questionnaires.

Results

17 090 patients were seen from 01 June 2023 until 01 June 2024, and of these 195 (1.14%) were tested for HIV. Of these, 2.05% (n=4) were positive and 0.5% (n=1) were equivocal. It was uncertain whether these were previously known positive cases or first-time diagnosis. Comparing this to national figures, in 2023 there were 911 total HIV diagnoses in Ireland, giving a rate of 17.7 per 100,000 population according to the Health Protection Surveillance Centre.

Regarding the attitudes surrounding HIV tests in ED, 60% (n=15) agreed that the ED should offer HIV testing. 56% (n=14) agreed that written consent should be taken before doing an HIV test, while 28% (n=7) disagreed. 48% (n=12) felt verbal consent was sufficient for HIV testing, while 36% disagreed and 12% voted neutrally.



Legend

1. The ED should offer HIV testing
2. Healthcare workers should take written consent prior to HIV testing
3. It is sufficient for healthcare workers to take verbal consent prior to HIV testing.
4. Healthcare workers should educate patients about PrEP and PEP.
5. The ED should offer HIV testing to ALL patients.
6. The ED should offer HIV testing to high-risk patients.
7. ED patients will benefit from knowledge of their HIV status
8. I am afraid that if we offer patients HIV testing, they will be offended or upset.
9. Offering HIV testing will take too much time and will interfere with my job duties
10. I am comfortable disclosing the results of a positive HIV test to a patient.

Conclusions

After the 2021 United Nations (UN) General Assembly, the UN set a 2025 goal that 95% of people with HIV should know their status in our aim to eradicate AIDS by 2030. Adopting the opt-out approach as the general culture is conducive to making progress towards this. This project highlighted an opportunity to educate staff on the opt-out approach to HIV testing. The study can then be repeated after this educational intervention, to assess the efficacy of the same.

References

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