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Partner notification

High potential but limited implementation

Tom Platteau
Sexologist, PhD



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Definition

Partner notification:

Informing (sexual) **partners** that they have been **exposed** to a sexually transmitted infection including HIV



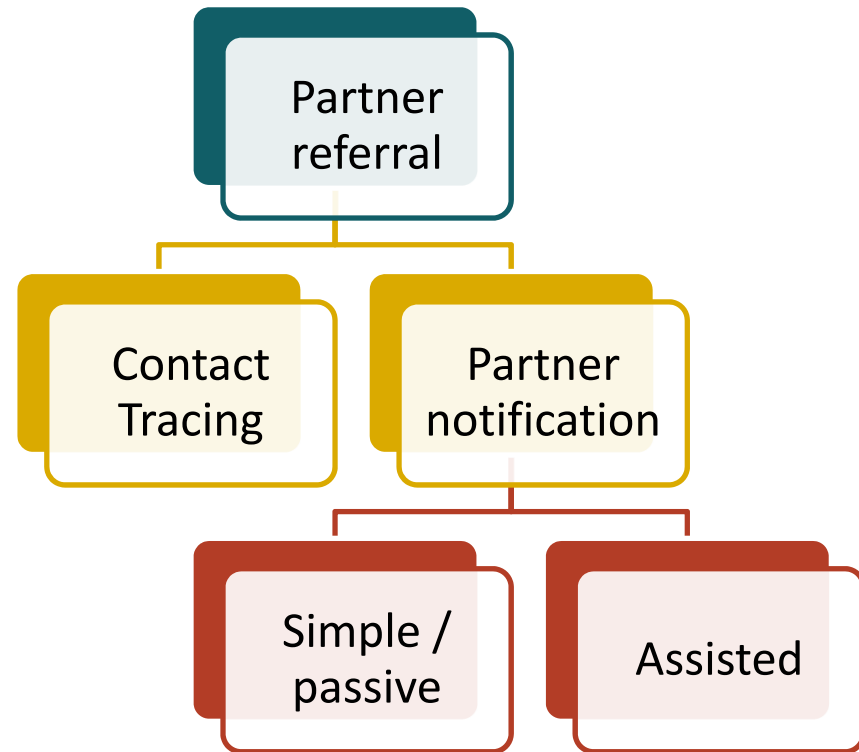
Terminology

People involved

Index patient (diagnosed with STI)

Notified partner (potentially infected with STI)

Health care provider



How relevant is partner notification?

... a cornerstone of public health approaches aimed to stop the spread of STI, including HIV

... a central component of sexually transmitted disease control programs for decades

... one of the most effective means of controlling STDs

... essential to prevent re-infection and further spread



Partner notification in guidelines and recommendations

Integrated in European **guidelines** for patient management (IUSTI) ¹

ECDC: “voluntary and anonymous PN among MSM is **recommended**, even though evidence is pending” ²

WHO: “Voluntary assisted PN services should be offered as part of a comprehensive package of testing and care offered to people with HIV (**strong recommendation**, moderate quality evidence)” ³

1 The International Union against Sexually Transmitted Infections (IUSTI). European Guidelines (for STI). <http://www.iusti.org/regions/europe/euroguidelines.htm>. Accessed January 25, 2019.

2 European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. *HIV and STI Prevention among Men Who Have Sex with Men HIV*. Stockholm; 2015.

3 World Health Organization. *Guidelines on HIV Self-Testing and Partner Notification: Supplement to Consolidated Guidelines on HIV Testing Services*. Geneva; 2016.



A vote

When a patient is diagnosed with an STI (including HIV), in how many of the cases do you discuss partner notification?



- a. Never
- b. Less than half of the time
- c. More than half of the time
- d. Always



Traditional partner notification





Traditional delivery of notifications

Personal conversation (*preferred method*)

Phone call

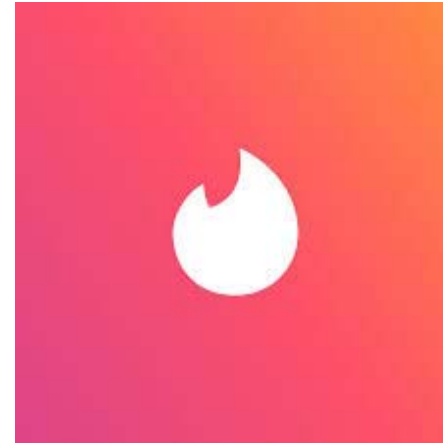
Letter

→ Specific context of sexual relations among key populations for HIV/STI





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Delivering notifications adapted to this specificity

Short Message Service (SMS)

E-mail

Via a website



Online tools (patient-initiated)

The screenshot shows the STDcheck.com website. The main heading is "Anonymous STD Test Notification". Below this, there are two options: "Send Anonymous Notification by Phone or E-mail". The "Phone" option is selected. There is a text input field for "Phone Number:" with a placeholder "(xxx) xxx-xxxx". A "Send Text" button is visible. To the right, there is a "BBB Accredited Business" badge with a rating of "A+" and a "STD Test Pricing" section with a "See Prices & Packages" button.

The screenshot shows the ITK website. The main heading is "On STIs". A magnifying glass is positioned over the text "On STIs". To the right, there is a "Sexually Transmitted Infection Fact sheets" section. The website has a navigation menu with "Let Them Know", "Home", "STI", "Let Them Know", "Doctor Info", "Partner Info", and "Feedback".

The screenshot shows a text message from SPOT. The message is split into two columns. The left column is green and contains the text "Got laid. Was happy." The right column is red and contains the text "Got tested. Wasn't Healthy." Below the columns, it says "Better get your own STI checkup soon." and "Personal message goes here." At the bottom, it says "This is from a friend at SPOT the [STI] Internet Notification Service for Partners Or Tricks."

The screenshot shows the ITK website. The main heading is "An easy way to tell someone they may have been exposed to an STD/STI." Below this, there is a "Get Started" button. To the right, there is a "Send an email or text message notifying a person they may have been exposed to a STD/STI. The process is fast, free and completely anonymous!" section. The website has a navigation menu with "Enter your code", "New Message", "Help Center", "About Us", "Donate", and "Sign In".

Publicly accessible, open-source



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Online tools (hybrid programs)

Info publicly accessible

Sending notifications: code required

Health care based: linkage to care

PARTNER WAARSCHUWING

waarom waarschuwen? hoe vertel ik het? wat is een soa? wie zijn wij? Professionals

VERSTUUR OF BEKIJK JOUW SOA-WAARSCHUWING & INFORMATIE, TIPS EN FILMPJES

Iemand waarschuwen of ben je gewaarschuwd? Vul hier je code in

START >

U HEEFT EEN WAARSCHUWING ONTVANGEN VAN EEN (EX)PARTNER

Bekijk >

Partners waarschuwen kan ook **anoniem**. Partnerwaarschuwing.nl gaat zorgvuldig en vertrouwelijk om met je gegevens, zie het [privacybeleid](#).

GGD SENSE THUISARTS.NL SOAIDS

PARTNERALERT

HOME STDS ABOUT US PRIVACY CONTACT PROFESSIONALS

IT STOPS WITH ME!
RECEIVED A CODE?

Enter your code...

CONTINUE



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Key elements

Voluntary process	Confidential notification	Ease of use
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• E-mail• SMS	<p>Anonymous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No personal identifiers• No link between IP and NP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healthcare providers• Index patients• Notified partners



Considerations



- General vs. STI specific notifications

- Partner notification for HIV: normalisation vs. exceptionalism



Challenges and barriers for partner notification



Health care provider

Time constraints to discuss partner notification

Knowledge of existing tools

Value of partner notification in prevention and care

Technological innovation

2015 'next-generation' methods for HIV partner services (email, SMS) overtaken by reality

Mobile phone applications using gps technology make phone numbers or email addresses obsolete

→ Have we missed the momentum?



■ Patient

- Individual vs. public health perspective
- Recall (context)
- Contact details (casual/anonymous partners)
- (Fear of) blame and shame, embarrassment, stigma
- (Fear of) physical violence

■ Few reported adverse effects or social harm





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Tom Plareau

+32 3 2476433

tplatteau@itg.be

Relevance and importance

- Partner notification, a type of voluntary and anonymous contact tracing supported by the CDC, has been a central component of sexually transmitted disease control programs for decades (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5730071/>)
- Effective partner notification (PN) and partner treatment (PT) are essential to prevent re-infection and further spread (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5738758/>)
- Identifying, notifying and treating sex partners of sexually transmitted infection (STI) patients is a cornerstone of public health approaches aimed to stop the spread of STI, including HIV (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6075470/>)
- Partner notification (PN) is generally acknowledged to be an important element of controlling sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25141854>)
- Partner notification (PN) is a core public health intervention for the prevention and control of sexually transmissible infections (STIs) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4967017/>)
- Partner notification and contact tracing, which originated in the United States in the 1940s to follow syphilis outbreaks, are a long-standing public health strategy used to reduce disease transmission and promote infection control. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5682127/>)
- ... partner notification (PN) is considered one of the most effective means of controlling sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4504284/>)
- Partner notification services (PNS) are recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as an effective public health intervention to reduce the transmission of STDs (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5793459/>)
- Partner notification (PN) and counseling – also known as partner services – has been in widespread use for the control of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) since the early 20th century (Hochberg, et al., 2015)
- Identifying, notifying, and treating sexually transmitted infection (STI) patients' partners is the foundation of public health approaches aimed to stop the spread of STI (Pellowski, et al., 2016)



Literature

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