Patients and health care providers experience with self-taken swab tests for gonorrhoea

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Background:

The Olafia Clinic has long experience with home sampling testing for chlamydia trachomatis (first void urine tests for male patients and vaginal swabs for female patients), but home sampling has not been offered to Men who have sex with men (MSM). MSM have routinely taken urine and anal swabs themselves when testing for sexually transmitted infections (STI) at the clinic, but pharyngeal swabs have always been taken by a health care provider. Extragenital gonorrhoea (GC) swabs are not validated for use with current NAATs (nucleic acid amplification tests).

We carried out a pilot study to observe whether self-taken pharyngeal tests could be included in our home sampling test kit, enabling us to provide home sampling testing to MSM, in order to increase screening for STI's.

Material and Methods:

After consenting to participate in the study, patients watched a video of how a pharyngeal swab test should be taken. The patient then took the test under nurse observation, subsequently the nurse took a second swab test. Both tests where analyzed and compared.

After the tests were taken, both the patient and the nurse filled out a questionnaire about their experience.

Results:

Out of 81 patients 78 were included in the study. 85% of the patients found it easy to take the test themselves.

Out of all participants 52,5 % said they would equally trust the test results of the self-taken test, whilst 43,5 % said they would not. Yet 69% said they would order home sampling kits if offered, whilst 17 % said they would not (fig. 1).

The main reason mentioned for not wanting the kit was the lack of blood tests.

Only one out of 78 swabs were positive for GC.

A health care provider observed when patients took tests. The health care provider responded that 86 % of the patients took the test as instructed in the video. 4 % did not take the test as instructed (fig. 2).

Conclusion:

This possibility for home sampling kits is a sought after service in the MSM population, and can increase testing activity in certain populations. This study shows that self-taken pharyngeal samples for GC NAAT are both sensitive and acceptable to this group.

Summary:

Pharyngeal gonorrhoea testing is an important part of STI screening for MSM. This pilot study shows that self-taken pharyngeal swabs for gonorrhoea is an acceptable method and can be included in home testing kits for this group, providing a full screening for bacterial STI's.