

Reaching the “hard-to-reach” MSM through VCT in collaboration with a TCM practitioner

Background :

VCT provided for MSM in traditional settings was ineffective to reach the MSM community. An innovative approach integrating the concepts of “societal normalisation” and “cultural acceptance” into HIV prevention helped normalise and scale up VCT among MSM.

Method :

A peer counsellor with Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) qualifications provided VCT for MSM in 4 gay saunas and 1 TCM centre after receiving VCT training.

Result :

- > 558 tests on HIV/STDs were conducted from May to November 2008.
- > 14 cases (2.5%) confirmed to be HIV positive.

Conclusion :

- > MSM were more comfortable in discussing their concerns about HIV/AIDS with a peer counsellor with TCM qualifications.
- > Cultural acceptance of TCM helped normalise and scale up VCT among MSM.
- > The innovative approach was able to reach the “hard to reach” MSM with higher risks.
- > The integration of VCT and TCM facilitated MSM to be more health conscious, thus conducive to their receiving HIV prevention messages and adopting safer sex.
- > The service was well received by owners of the gay saunas as this helped build an image that their patrons were health conscious.
- > Cultural appropriateness should be considered in the implementation of the service.

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