Is “Get Tested” Enough?
New Qualitative Research on Communication Strategies to Increase STI Testing

NECHA Annual Meeting
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Learning Objectives

- Identify strengths and limitations of “get tested” mass communication strategies

- Describe a new approach to communications designed to increase STI testing
Applied Learning Experience (ALE)
ALE Project Aims

Create a deliverable that coordinates with Boston University’s snail-mail condom distribution program and is designed to increase:

1) Knowledge of STI-risk for unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex among students;

2) STI testing rates among students
Boston University

- 16,500 undergraduates (33,000+ student body)
- Students from every U.S. state, 100+ countries
- 1 in 4 is an international student
- Over 250 programs of study
BU Student Health Services

- Employs 77 staff with 43,000 appointments per year
  - Primary Care
  - Wellness & Prevention
  - Behavioral Medicine
  - Sexual Assault Response & Prevention
Wellness & Prevention Services

- **Staff Makeup**
  - 2 FTE (1 MPH, 1 LMHC)
  - 3 part-time graduate student employees
  - 1 part-time undergraduate intern
  - 16 peer educators

- **Annual Impact on Campus**
  - 200 programs that served 15,000 students in AY 14-15
Problem Statement:

Youth bear disproportionate share of STIs

Americans ages 15-24 make up just 27% of the sexually active population.

But account for 50% of the 20M new STIs in the U.S. each year.

Source: cdc.gov
Barriers to STI Testing Among College-Age Youth

- Lack of health insurance
- Lack of transportation to services
- Inability to pay for services
- Concerns about confidentiality
- Discomfort with STI procedures
- Perceived to not be at-risk
- Unsure about what’s involved in getting tested
- Unsure of where to go
- Concerns about finding time to be tested
- Fear of diagnoses
- Negative attitude toward testing
- Perceived stigma

Balfe & Brugha, 2011; Boudewyns & Paquin, 2011; CDC, 2011; Chacko, 2008; Rzepka 2011
Barriers to STI Testing among BU Students

- I do not think I have a STI: 60%
- Difficulty finding time in my schedule: 54%
- Concerns about costs and fees: 42%
- Both my partner and I have not had any other partners in the past: 35%
- I am not sure where to go: 31%
- Fear that my parents will find out: 24%
- Fear of receiving a positive test result: 21%
- Concerns about what my friends may think: 13%

Source: Boston University Condom Fairy Program™ Pre-Test
Risk Factors

Photo: Richard T. Nowitz/Corbis
Using a condom or other protective barrier within the last 30 days ("mostly" or "always"):

Among students who reported sexual activity in the last 30 days

ACHA-NCHA II, 2014
Reported Testing in the Past Year among a Segment of BU Students

- Yes: 26%
- No: 70%
- Unsure: 4%

n=675

Source: Boston University Condom Fairy Program™ Pre-Test
Reported Concern About Health Issues, by Topic

- Sexual health issues
- Substance abuse
- Mental health issues

Rzepka, 2010
Mass Communications Approach
Research Question

1. How effective are current mass communications at increasing students’ intentions to be tested for STIs?
   
a) What content is needed to increase intentions to get tested?

b) What message style and tone do students prefer?

c) What channel(s) are best for disseminating messages about STI testing?
Research Methods
Small Group Activity

Review a message designed to increase intentions for STI testing. Consider the message’s style, tone, and communication channel.

Discuss the following questions:

1. What do you think students would like about this message?

2. What do you think students would dislike?

3. Would this message be effective at increasing STI testing among students? Why or why not?
Hot weekend?

Get checked for HIV and STDs

MANUP MONDAY.ORG
Get tested.

Call for free STI testing
+1 (203) 432-0312

It is all of our responsibilities as sexually active individuals to get tested regularly, regardless of whether or not we have had a “risky” encounter. Take the initiative to be proactive about your sexual health. Call now to make an appointment for free and confidential STI testing at YUHS or look out for our on-campus locations during Sex Week.

Sponsored by Peer Health Educators.
HOLY @%!
(YEAH, THAT WAS MY REACTION TOO.)

1 IN 2 SEXUALLY ACTIVE PEOPLE WILL GET AN STD BY THE AGE OF 25. MOST WON'T KNOW IT.

THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT
GET YOURSELF TESTED TODAY

GYT
GYTNOW.ORG
MORE THAN A REALLY GOOD IDEA
GET YOURSELF TESTED

THE ONLY WAY TO KNOW FOR SURE IF YOU OR ANYONE ELSE HAS AN STD IS TO GYT.

1 IN 2 SEXUALLY ACTIVE YOUNG PEOPLE WILL GET AN STD BY THE AGE OF 25. MOST WON'T KNOW IT.

2

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT TESTS HAVE GOTTEN EASIER AND QUICKER. EVEN BETTER NEWS: MOST STDs ARE CURABLE, AND ALL ARE TREATABLE.

3

ASK TO BE TESTED!
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

GYT
GYTNOW.ORG

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
AT DOLORES PARK CAFE

I WAS AT THIS CRAZY PARTY LAST NIGHT. IT WAS SO DARK IN THERE, I COULD BARELY SEE MY OWN BALLS...

SLURP!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MAN?

LOOKING FOR SYPHILIS SORES.

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THUMPA!
“[The poster] says, ‘whether or not you’ve had a risky encounter,’ so like, [that means] everyone. Even if you’ve been in a relationship for 5 years and that’s your only partner, you should probably make sure you’re alright. I like that.”
Tone

Hot weekend?
Get checked for HIV and STDs

Get tested.

HOLY &#@%! 1 in 5 sexually active people will get an STD but don't know it.

MORE THAN A REALLY GOOD IDEA GET YOURSELF TESTED

GET TESTED FOR SYPHILIS
"The humor makes it not big and scary, and shows it's preventable. I like the tone, it's very accessible."
Style

Hot weekend?
Get checked for HIV and STDs

Get tested.
Call for free STD testing
1-800-342-1341

HOLY &##@%!
One in five sexually active people will get an STD by the age of 20... YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT.

MORE THAN A REALLY GOOD IDEA
GET YOURSELF TESTED

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?
1. Keep the test
2. Tell a friend
3. Go to the doctor
4. Tell a family

GET TESTED FOR SYphilIS

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
"If this [poster] were in a magazine, I'd be likely to stop here. It's catchy, it gets me the main idea very quickly and then I could keep reading for more.

But if this was like, on one of those billboards outside of [the dorms], and I actually had to stop in front of it to read everything, college students wouldn't do that. It's like, one, the stigma, and being embarrassed, and two, we just don't have time.”
She delivers so you can too.

Discreet delivery to your on-campus mailbox.

Request free supplies at bu.edu/shs/condomfairy
Condom Fairy™ Program Objectives:

1. Decrease privacy, embarrassment barriers to condom use

2. Increase condom availability on campus

3. Increase accessibility of condoms, lubricant, and oral dams

4. Increase intention for STI testing among CF participants

5. Increase awareness of enthusiastic sexual consent
**Program Overview**

**Students…**
- Visit the Condom Fairy website
- Review the “Protection Plan” and available supplies
- Submit an electronic request form
- Receive a confirmation email with a pre-test survey link

**Staff…**
- Download the request data
- Print reports with student requests
- Send post-test survey ~4 weeks after request is made

**Peer Educators…**
- Assemble students’ orders in discreet packaging

**BU Mail Services…**
- Pick up packages and deliver them on-campus
"I know of locations in Boston that offer free STI testing."

Source: Boston University Condom Fairy Program™ Evaluation
"Which of the following statements best describes you?"

- I have never considered getting tested for STIs.
  - Pre-test (n=134): 28%
  - Post-test (n=227): 16%

- I have thought about getting tested.
  - Pre-test (n=134): 41%
  - Post-test (n=227): 44%

- I have made an appt, or plan to make one soon.
  - Pre-test (n=134): 3%
  - Post-test (n=227): 3%

- I have been tested for STIs at least once.
  - Pre-test (n=134): 24%
  - Post-test (n=227): 32%

- I get tested for STIs before every new sexual partner.
  - Pre-test (n=134): 4%
  - Post-test (n=227): 5%

Source: Boston University Condom Fairy Program™ Evaluation
“What motivated you to get tested?”

- I was starting a new sexual relationship: 48%
- I had unprotected sex: 38%
- Materials I received from the Condom Fairy: 29%
- A doctor's recommendation: 27%
- I suspected I had symptoms of an STI: 13%
- My partner asked that I get tested: 10%
- A family member or friend's recommendation: 6%

Source: Survey-based program evaluation
Theory of Planned Behavior
Transtheoretical Model

Cycle Of Change
Prochaska & DiClemente

- Pre-Contemplation
  No intention on changing behavior

- Contemplation
  Aware a problem exists; No commitment to action

- Preparation
  Intent on taking action

- Action
  Active modification of behavior

- Maintenance
  Sustained change — new behavior replaces old

- Relapse
  Fall back into old pattern of behaviors

Upward Spiral
Learn from each relapse
Proposed Content

KEEP CALM AND GET TESTED
The Condom Fairy's STI Testing Survival Guide

STI TESTING SURVIVAL GUIDE
COMPLETE PROTECTION FROM YOUR TESTING ANXIETIES

By THE CONDOM FAIRY

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
Letter from the Condom Fairy

Hey Students!

Thanks for keeping me busy with your orders for safer sex supplies - it seems you've all been pretty busy as well ;)

I'm glad you're having fun and staying safe, but there's one little thing we need to talk about: STI testing. I know, I know, you hear it all the time: get tested. Well, you *know* it's a good idea, but everyone's telling you what to do, and they're not telling you *how* to do it!
Risk Assessment Quiz

START HERE

Have you been tested for STIs before?

Yes

How many NEW sexual partners have you had since getting tested?

0

How many sexual partners have you had?

More than 1

At least one other

How many sexual partners has your partner had?

Don't know, for sure

Only me, for sure

Sexually active means having genital-to-genital, oral-to-genital, genital-to-anal, oral-to-anal contact, or any exchange of body fluids.

No

Have you ever been sexually active?

Yes

You probably do not need to get tested for STIs, right now, but if your situation changes, talk to your partner and your healthcare provider about your risk.

No

It's probably time to get tested again. Look through this booklet for tips to help you decide when to go.

1 or more

It's time to put on your big kid pants and go get tested. Most STIs don't have any symptoms, so the only way for you to know your status for sure is to get tested. But don't worry, most STIs are curable, and ALL are treatable, so you're going to be just fine.
STI Spotlights

Chlamydia

- Chlamydia is the most common bacterial STI reported in the U.S.
- It can be passed along during any type of sexual contact. It can infect the genitals, anus, eyes, or throat.
- Known as a "silent" infection because most times, there are no symptoms.
- Can be treated by oral antibiotics.
- If left undiagnosed and untreated, chlamydia can lead to Pelvic Inflammatory Disease and potentially infertility.
## What’s Going to Happen?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infection</th>
<th>How they test for it</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>Urine test or self-administered genital swab</td>
<td>Antibiotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhea</td>
<td>Urine test or self-administered genital swab</td>
<td>Antibiotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>Blood test</td>
<td>Antibiotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Saliva test or blood test</td>
<td>Medication and therapy to manage disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPV</td>
<td>Visual examination of symptoms or cervical screening</td>
<td>Removal of warts, topical medications to manage warts, treatments and minor procedures to prevent abnormalities found during cervical screenings from becoming cancerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herpes</td>
<td>Visual examination of symptoms</td>
<td>Medications to reduce the number of outbreaks, treat symptoms, and reduce the chance of spreading herpes to sexual partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Getting Ready

If you're thinking about getting tested, but you don't want to go it alone, why not ask a friend or a partner to go with you? Chances are, they might be thinking the same thing! Here are some ways you could open up that dialogue:

- Did you see that STI Testing Survival Guide in the latest Condom Fairy package? Maybe we should make appointments at Health Services. We can go at the same time, and then go get some ice cream after!
## Comparison Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Cost/Insurance</th>
<th>Appointment</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| BU Student Health Services | Testing for chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV, Pap tests for HPV, physical exams for herpes | Students enrolled in the Aetna Student Health insurance plan can access all services for free, and will not get a bill. Students with outside insurance can see a provider for free, but lab tests will be sent out, and a bill will be sent to the address on file. | You need an appointment to be seen. You can make an appointment by calling or online through Patient Connect. Most of the time, you will get an appointment within a few days. | Student Health Services  
881 Commonwealth Ave  
Patient Connect website:  
http://www.bu.edu/shs/resources/factsheets/patientconnect/  
Phone: 617-353-3575  
STI Info:  
http://www.bu.edu/shs/wellness/wellness-programs/sexual/sexually-transmitted-infections-stis/ |
Now What?

So, you did it. You got tested. You, my friend, are a rock star. Now that *that's* over with, what do you do now?

If your results were positive:

Don't Panic! You are not alone. Millions of people get diagnosed with an STI every year, so chances are, you already know someone who's been through this. Remember, most STIs are totally curable, and ALL are treatable. We're gonna get through this!
Dear Condom Fairy,

I've been dating around for a couple of years now, and have never been tested for STIs. I don't have any burning or itching, but my friend told me I should get tested anyway. What should I get tested for? - Curious

Dear Curious,

Your friend is right; most STIs don't show any symptoms, so you can't rely on your body to tell you that you have an infection. The good news is that you probably don't need to get tested for everything! Chlamydia and gonorrhea are the most common STIs among college students. If you are tested at Student Health Services, your provider will ask questions about your sexual history to determine which tests you need. If you go to a different clinic, you should ask for their advice on which STIs you should be tested for.

Condom Fairy

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Dear Condom Fairy,

My high school girlfriend and I went on a break for our first semester at college. We ended up hooking up while we were home for break. You helped me have safer sex at school, but since you can't discreetly deliver to my parents' house, I didn't have a condom. I'm not sure if my girlfriend was with other people, so I want to get tested. How much will that cost, and can I keep it a secret from my parents? - Worried

Dear Worried,

If you have the BU Astra Student Health insurance, testing is free and confidential at Student Health Services. There are also places that provide free and confidential STI testing without billing insurance—confirming your parents' insurance, such as Boston Medical Center STD Clinic or Project Trust (see page 10 for more info). Cost varies at clinics depending on your health insurance, but most insurance plans do cover STI testing. To ensure the exact cost, call the number on your insurance card.

Condom Fairy

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Dear Condom Fairy,

I've been hanging out with this guy I met in class, and things have been heating up lately. I asked my doctor to test me for STIs at my last visit, and the test came back negative. I'd like to keep my clean bill of health, so I want to ask him to get tested before we have sex. How can I ask him without raising the moment? - Awkward

Dear Awkward,

Way to take the initiative! Starting a new sexual relationship is a common reason to get tested, so he should understand. Next time you're having sex, you could say, "I'm scared to take things further, but I want to make sure we're being safe." What is the last time you were tested? Maybe you were tested after his last partner and you're good to go! If he hasn't been tested, tell him that most single individuals at Student Health Services are only 15 minutes away. And it's probably as easy as pushing in a cup! Remember that if he has something you won't know; less than half of us just want to be sure you're both healthy before getting it on. If he refuses to get tested even after you give him time to think about it, maybe he wants to re-evaluate getting hot and heavy with you.

Condom Fairy

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Dear Condom Fairy,

There are 1 in 6 sexually active people who get an STI by age 25. STIs in Boston:

- 2x the national rate
- 64% of Boston chlamydia cases are among people ages 15-24
- 80% of chlamydia cases exhibit no symptoms
- 20% of untreated chlamydia and gonorrhea cases result in Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) in women
- PID leads to chronic pelvic pain in 18% of women
- And infertility in 8% of women
Summary

- Certain “get tested” campaigns grab attention and resonate with students, but may not lead to action
- Students appreciate messages that use humor as well as relatable images and language
- Communications that are more comprehensive in the information that they provide may be more effective
- Students desire communication channels that are more discreet, suggesting snail-mail as an effective approach
Don’t thank me, the pleasure’s all yours.

Discreet delivery to your on-campus mailbox.
Request free supplies at bu.edu/shs/condomfairy

Questions or Comments?
References

References, cont.

References, cont.