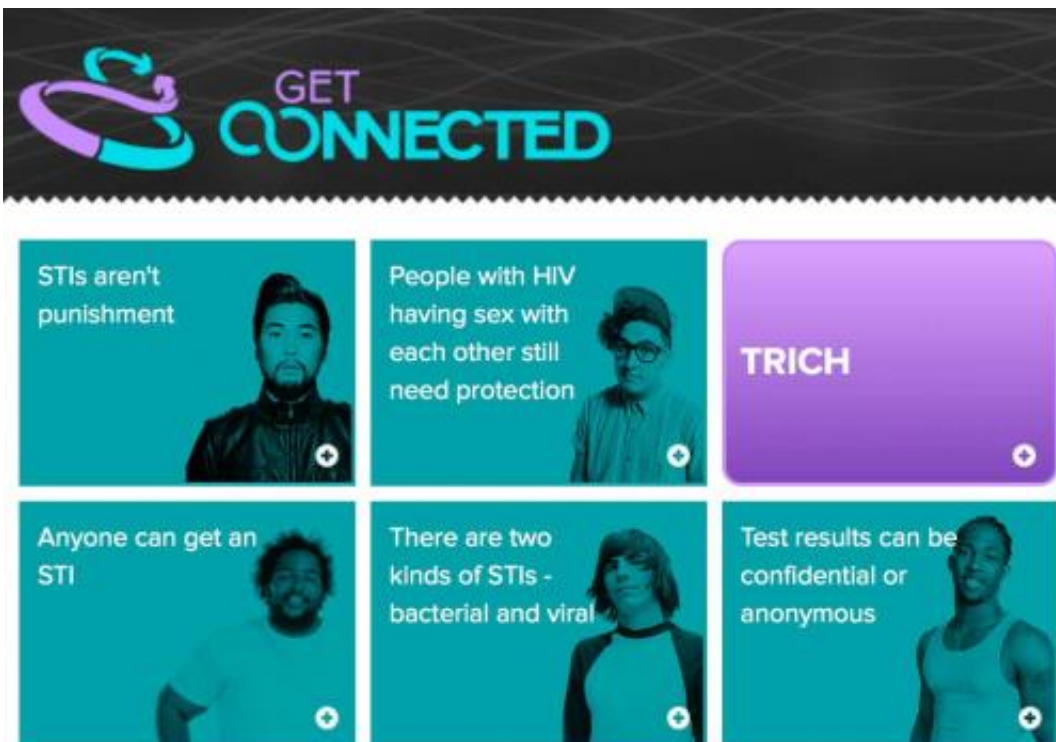


Web app prompts important sexual health testing

February 24 2015, by Laurel Thomas Gnagey



A personalized web app designed to encourage young men at risk for sexually transmitted diseases to go for testing has proven successful in a small trial conducted in Southeast Michigan.

Researchers at the University of Michigan's Center for Sexuality & Health Disparities developed the web-based program called "[Get](#)

[Connected](#)" to encourage [young men](#) who have sex with men to get tested for HIV and other [sexually transmitted infections](#), including chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis.

Out of the 130 young men, ages 15 to 24, who used the [app](#), 104 returned for a 30-day follow-up. A third of respondents who came back reported that they had tested for HIV and other STI.

One person was newly diagnosed with HIV and two others were found to have another sexually transmitted infection.

Jose Bauermeister, the John G. Searle Assistant Professor in Health Behavior and Health Education at the U-M School of Public Health, said although there are online sites for young men to locate an HIV/STI testing center, these resources often fail to include opportunities for young men to overcome barriers that keep them from getting tested.

In cooperation with the Center for Health Communications Research at U-M, the team adapted the Centers for Disease Control and Preventions' Project Connect Health Systems Intervention to create an app that uses targeted images and questions based on the responses of individuals.

"Tailoring allows us to maximize the flexibility of an online intervention," Bauermeister said. "We can customize the content based on users' risk profile, their values and needs, and other characteristics unique to each individual."

For example, he said, some young men may feel a sense of responsibility for knowing their health status so that they do not harm current or future partners. Others may respond more to an approach that appeals to their sense of confidence; that knowing what is going on with their health is empowering. The program interface uses these different values to personalize the importance of getting tested.

Bauermeister said a larger study is the next step, leading to further refinement of the app that he and the team hope will become an open-source tool for programs across the country to adapt and use in their communities.

"Continuing to examine the public health potential of our site remains a priority for us," he said. "However, it is equally important for us that resources emerging from our work are shared with the larger Southeast Michigan community as they become available."

While the team works to secure funding for the next step, Bauermeister has made components of the [web app](#) available for the public's use.

More information: "Acceptability and Preliminary Efficacy of a Tailored Online HIV/STI Testing Intervention for Young Men who have Sex with Men: The Get Connected! Program." *AIDS and Behavior*. [link.springer.com/article/10.1 ... 61-015-1009-y#page-1](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11262-015-0100-9)

Provided by University of Michigan

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