

HIV research increases number of people coming forward for testing

August 18 2015, by Jeanette Earl

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An international study completed by staff at Canterbury Christ Church University with colleagues from Kent County Council and NHS partners in Kent and Medway has demonstrated that targeted public health, social media and improved training for healthcare professionals can increase the number and timeliness of HIV tests undertaken by those at risk of infection in the region.

The findings of the Interreg IVA Channel Programme funded [research project](#) designed to target the late testing and diagnosis of HIV in Kent, Medway and Picardy in northern France showed positive outcomes in each of the areas covered by the study in comparison to baseline data collected in the same period during the previous year.

The number of HIV tests undertaken in a five month period by NHS laboratories between 1st October 2014 and the 28th February 2015 increased by 1,946 or 7.8% in Kent and Medway from 24,874 tests to

26,821 tests in comparison with the same period in 2013/14. Percentage increases varied from 4.4% for the wide area covered by Kent Community Health Foundation Trust to 13.9% for Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust with Medway Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust showing an increase of 7.6%.

The increase in the number of tests conducted was attributed to a threefold strategy including the conduct of a parallel [public health](#) and social media campaign which included the display of posters and leaflets carrying the project's 'It's better to know your HIV status' motto, a series of prime-time discussion programmes and broadcasts on local radio and television stations highlighting the benefits of early HIV testing; and a designated Facebook and Twitter account based on Kent County Council's Public Health webpages alerting people to local testing and screening opportunities in their area.

Overall, results in the UK were much better than those in Picardy in France, where a national campaign to increase the number and timeliness of HIV testing has been in place for a number of years, but even here, improvements were seen in the number of people attending private high street laboratories or testing centres belonging to the French HIV charity AIDES.

Dr Stephen O'Connor, Reader in the School of Nursing at Canterbury Christ Church University, said: "This project, and its subsequent results, has been a valuable exercise as it has shown that we can improve the health outcomes for patients with HIV via earlier diagnosis and treatment.

"Around half of all patients diagnosed HIV positive in Kent and Medway are diagnosed at a late stage. If someone is diagnosed a long time after they have been infected with HIV, it is more likely that the virus will have already seriously damaged their immune system. Late diagnosis is

one of the biggest contributing factors to illness and death for people with HIV. Early diagnosis is important so people can start treatment if they need to, look after their own health and take steps to ensure they don't pass the virus on."

Copies of the final report of the study can be found on Canterbury Christ Church University's research repository [CReaTE](#).

In addition, a copy of the short video developed by clinicians working on the project about the indicators for and benefits of an early HIV test can be found on [Vimeo](#).

Further projects are now being planned to reduce sexual risk taking behaviours in relation to specific client groups identified by the study and thus prevent infection with HIV in the first place.

Provided by Canterbury Christ Church University

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