

Abstract

Acceptability and operational suitability of a rapid point-of-care diagnostic test for syphilis in high-risk populations of Manaus, Brazil

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Objectives The implementation of syphilis screening programmes may be hampered by operational and technical difficulties. We evaluated the acceptability and operational characteristics of a rapid point-of-care (POC) diagnostic test for syphilis using fingerprick blood at a red-light district clinic in Manaus, Brazil.

Methods This qualitative and quantitative study was undertaken within a larger field performance evaluation of a novel POC test for syphilis (VisiTect Syphilis, Omega Diagnostics, Alloa, Scotland). We interviewed all 12 staff involved in using the test and 60 patients (60% women) attending the clinic. We performed time flow analysis on a separate sub-sample of 84 consecutive patients who were not interviewed.

Results Staff found the POC test easy to use and to interpret. Half had limited confidence in the test results since it does not differentiate between old and recent syphilis. Clinic accessibility, waiting time, and confidence in test results were not identified as obstacles for testing by patients. However, pain caused by fingerprick and patient's preferences for venous blood collection were listed as minor barriers. Table 1 shows patients' satisfaction with the services and testing provided and their syphilis knowledge. Excluding time spent on receiving treatment for 7 (8.3%) of patients, the average duration spent at the clinic was 51 minutes (standard deviation, 32).

Questions		Responses Number (%)
Satisfaction with clinical attention [measured on a scale from 0 (totally unsatisfactory) to 5 (totally satisfactory)]	5 out of 5	56 (94)
	4 out of 5	4 (6)
Would recommend rapid test to friends /colleagues	Yes	57 (95)
	No	2 (5)
Information received from clinical staff	Satisfactory	36 (60)
	Difficult to understand	8 (13)
	Did not receive information	16 (27)
Syphilis knowledge (open question)	Is a STI	12 (20)
	Explained some or all of its symptoms	12 (20)
	Explained some of its complications	5 (8)
Syphilis transmission (open question)	Unprotected sex	12 (20)
	Sex regardless of condom use	19 (32)
	Mother to child	6 (10)
	Contaminated blood	13 (22)
	Kisses	6 (10)
	Sitting in the same place	3 (5)
	Skin lesions	2 (3)
Can syphilis be cured?	Yes	53 (89)
	Don't know	6 (11)

Conclusions The POC test was found acceptable and operationally suitable as a screening tool in high-risk groups, and it was performed within reasonable waiting time. It could considerably alleviate the burden of syphilis in hard-to-reach populations in the Amazon region of Brazil.