

Process Analysis of Rapid Testing (PART) Study

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Project Description: The Process Analysis of Rapid Testing (PART) study is using qualitative process analysis methods to describe the strategies counseling and testing (C&T) counselors use in their rapid HIV test counseling session and identify obstacles counselors face in providing effective risk reduction counseling. A major obstacle to counseling we identified in our research is the standardized client risk assessment form that must be completed for each client. Counselors spend one quarter to half the session completing this form, using valuable time that could be better spent providing client-centered risk-reduction counseling.

We recently piloted a new way to collect this data in order to facilitate counseling. Through a collaboration with test sites and health departments in San Francisco and Berkeley, we developed a client self-administered survey using handheld, touch-screen computers to collect the client-level data prior to the test session. Data are transmitted directly into local and state databases without the need for manual data entry by the DPH. Most importantly, counselors and clients are free to have a deeper discussion about the client's current and future concerns instead of interrogating the client about past risk behavior for the form. Without the form structuring the session, counselors will need additional training and supervision to determine the most effective ways to use the 20 minutes with clients.

We will work with the State Office of AIDS on a guide to help test sites implement the computerized method for collecting client data. We are currently seeking additional funds to develop software that would enhance supervision and training and facilitate process analysis at the test sites. The software would be based on Transana, a free and open source software program for segmenting and transcribing video and audio data. We are working with the Transana developer to enable it to create time charts as you segment and code audio files. We will collaborate with two test sites to develop protocols for training and supervision using software and evaluate the effects of the software on counselor practice using counselor focus groups and time charts. The ability to create time charts easily with Transana will also provide powerful new research tools to evaluate the effectiveness of new HIV prevention interventions and better understand current services such as HIV test counseling or prevention for positives.

Significance: Rapid HIV testing is currently being implemented nationwide as part of an initiative to bring services directly to high-risk populations. The OraQuick® rapid test represents a revolution in the practice of C&T because it compresses the standard pre- and post-test sessions, normally separated by a week, into a single session, thus ensuring that clients receive their test results. While eliminating the stress of a week-long wait for the client, rapid testing presents new challenges for test counselors. For example, counselors learn their clients' results immediately before disclosing it to the client and no longer have time to prepare to deliver the news. Counselors also find it challenging to develop enough rapport with frequent testers to engage them in risk-reduction counseling during the 20 minutes between collecting the sample and disclosing the result.