

“Most young men think you have to be naked in front of the GP”

Changing young men’s perceptions on sexual health care

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Photo: Joe Vittorio

Background

Young men attending General Practice rarely present with sexual health complaints, making it difficult for GPs to offer opportunistic education and STI screening. In Australia 75% of all STI diagnoses occur within 15-29 year olds and STI rates among young men are high and rising.¹ Little is known of the barriers preventing young men from accessing General Practice for their sexual health care or of the sexual health promotional strategies which may be acceptable to young men.²

Aims

To determine what factors inhibit young men from accessing primary care services for sexual health needs and what strategies could be employed to promote this with the long term goal of improving young men’s sexual health.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with young men aged 18-24 years. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were analysed using content and thematic analysis.

Results

Participant Demographics (N=13)			
Age (years)	18-24 (mean 19.9)		
Nationality	Australian (8)	International Student (5)	
Living Arrangements	Family (10)	Alone (2)	Friends (1)
Relationship Status	Single (8)	In a relationship < 1 year (4)	In a relationship > 1 year (1)
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual (9)	Gay (3)	Prefer not to say (1)

Barriers to Sexual Health Care

Ideas of Masculinity

men feel like they got to contain everything, [...] they gotta be stronger than what they are

19, Australian, gay

because they're men so they should be strong, so they don't want to show their weakness to other people

22, International, gay

Lack of Concern

men just kind of shrug it off

18, International, heterosexual

I don't think it's too big on anyone's minds

20, Australian, gay

Embarrassment

I'd say for most part there's that embarrassment factor

19, Australian, heterosexual

they find it a bit ashamed telling what they've done to the GP so a bit of embarrassment

18, International, prefer not to say

Privacy

as for all my visits my parents have been in there as well, so I think that could be a bit awkward

18, Australian, heterosexual

it's like umm, I, I need to see the doctor but umm, I don't want others to know about my disease

19, International, heterosexual

Not Knowing Where to Go

Some people they don't know where to go, like me [...] do I go to a hospital and just say at the front desk or is there like a specialised person who deals with these issues?

18, Australian, sexual preference not disclosed

I don't even know where an STI specialist or check-up centre is

21, Australian, heterosexual

Thoughts on Sexual Health Promotion

Facebook

maybe Facebook now cos yeah, why not? Everyone is using Facebook

19, International, heterosexual

I'd be quite intimidated if randomly [...] a picture of genitalia with umm, some disease on it, it would be quite confronting

19, Australian, heterosexual

Text Messages

I think text messages are a too private, cos you know, people will [...] wonder how you gonna get my number?

22, International, heterosexual

it's become more of a standard way [...] to deliver information. So it should be fine

18, Australian, heterosexual

Posters

I was looking at the guy wearing underwear [an Australian advertisement for STI testing], people around me think [...] you really weird

22, International, gay

it would be kind of strange if I saw someone reading a massive pamphlet that had like a picture of a penis on it [...] I wouldn't go and look at that, it would maybe be too [...] like kind of embarrassing if someone saw you like looking at it

21, Australian, heterosexual

University Lectures

it would be a good idea, especially for people like myself who didn't have any like lessons about it from someone educated and reliable

18, International, heterosexual

it should be one of the main subjects in undergrad for every bachelor's degree yeah.

18, Australian, heterosexual

Conclusions & Implications

The young men were comfortable discussing sexual health with a GP if they felt they needed to.

I would but just if I'm going there just for that
19, International, heterosexual

The young men were also willing to discuss sexual health in any consultation provided the GP addressed their primary concern.

after I've finished [...] the talk about my current diseases and then [...] bring up the topic, I think that's ok, don't just [...] stay talking about the sexual health and ignore my current disease
24, International, heterosexual

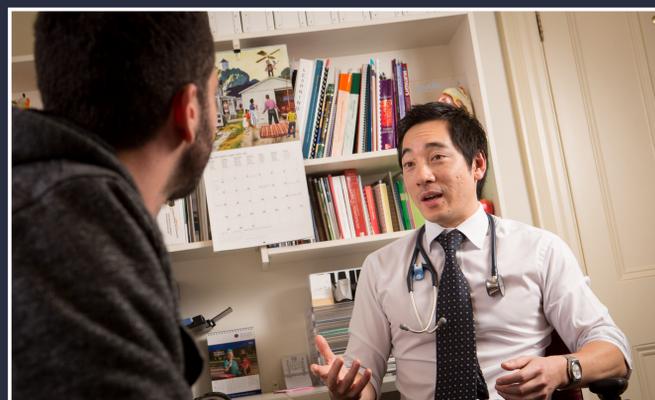


Photo: Peter Casamento

We should rethink the expectations placed on young men and offer novel strategies to help them look after their sexual health. GPs can help young men feel more at ease to discuss sexual health by affirming privacy, acknowledging its sensitivity and bringing up sexual health appropriately. Universities should provide young men with appropriate sexual health information. Multiple methods of promotion should also be designed to best reach and engage young men.

REFERENCES:
¹Giordano M, Ross A. Let's talk About Sex: Young People's views on sex and sexual health information in Australia. June 2012. Available at www.redaware.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Lets-Talk-About-Sex_AYACYEAH_FinalReport.pdf [Accessed 30 June 2013].
²Latreille S, Colyer A, Temple-Smith M. Finding a Segue into Sex: young men's views on discussing sexual health with a GP. Australian Family Physician. 2014; 43(4): 217-221.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:
I would like to thank all the young men who participated in my study.
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