

**Title:** A practical and useful methodology for community involvement in the implementation of rapid HIV testing in labor and delivery settings: focus groups

**Health department/organization:** Puerto Rico Department of Health

**Authors:** Mayra Piar, MS (email: mpiar@salud.gov.pr);  
Eileen Pérez, SW (email: eiperez@salud.gov.pr);  
Rolando Jiménez, MPHE (email: rjimenez@salud.gov.pr);  
Clemente Díaz, MD (email: cdiaz@rcm.upr.edu);  
Alberto Carrera, MD (email: acarrera@rcm.upr.edu)

**Goals:** Promote rapid HIV testing at labor and delivery

**Program type:** Rapid testing

**Collaborators:** Other HIV/AIDS program staff; School of Medicine and hospital of the University of Puerto Rico

## Background/Objective

Detection of HIV during pregnancy is an essential component in preventing and treating perinatal transmission of HIV. Conventional HIV diagnostic tests even when done in expedited fashion can not be successfully offered universally and with prompt turn-around time when women arrive in labor without evidence of having been tested for HIV during pregnancy. The main objective was to assess women's preferences and acceptability of rapid testing procedures while in labor.

## Methods

Focus group methodology was used to gather information on women's knowledge, preferences and acceptance of rapid testing procedures. Group interview guidelines were designed for interviewers and instructions developed for interviewees. Three facilitators participated in focus group sessions. Questions were designed to evaluate knowledge and feelings toward HIV diagnostic tests, preferences regarding educational and counseling techniques to be used while women are in labor; acceptance of rapid testing procedures, and preferences related to who should deliver test results while in labor.

## Results

Six focus group sessions were organized targeting the following female populations: HIV-positive women, illegal immigrants, pregnant women not HIV-infected, drug users, and adolescents. Fifty-one women participated, age distribution as follows: 18 women ages 16-21 years old; 15 women ages 22-32 years old; 13 women ages 33-45 years old; 2 women ages 46-56 years old; and 3 women of unknown age. Most of the participants (74%) agreed that they would be tested for HIV using a rapid HIV test if they arrived in labor at the ER/delivery room without evidence of having been tested for HIV during pregnancy. Fourteen percent correctly identified conventional HIV screening and diagnostic tests (enzyme immunoassay, Western blot) by name. Also, 14% stated that they know all the phases of the regimen utilized to prevent perinatal transmission of HIV. Forty-six percent responded that, while in labor, they would prefer the counseling to be delivered in person. All participants stated that they definitively would not like to have the counseling session delivered through an audiocassette. Twenty-five percent said that the doctor should be the one delivering test results.

## **Conclusions**

Focus group methodology has proven to be an effective tool for assessing consumer's preferences regarding educational messages, counseling techniques and other strategies so that the project is successful in implementing effective and sensitive actions. Findings from the focus group sessions were crucial in planning and developing strategies and interventions accepted by targeted populations.

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