

A simulated patient study investigating availability and accessibility of HIV self-testing kits from Australian community pharmacies

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Background:

Regular and accessible testing is a key component of strategies to promote early detection and reduced transmission of HIV. Although HIV self-testing kits were initially approved as an additional option for HIV screening to consumers in Australia via online suppliers or approved health organisations, access to the kits through community pharmacies was authorised in 2021. Limited evidence regarding the experience of accessing these kits via community pharmacies exists. Consequently, this study aims to explore the availability and accessibility of HIV self-testing kits from community pharmacies using the simulated patient method.

Methods:

A random sample of 365 community pharmacies from Australian states and territories with registers of pharmacy premises was generated and stratified according to location (Metropolitan/Regional, Rural, Remote) per the Modified Monash Model. Three cis-male researchers designed a standardised telephone script and telephoned pharmacies to enquire about the availability of HIV self-testing kits, acting as members of the public. Primary data collection commenced in April 2024. Interaction details were documented and analysed descriptively.

Results:

To date, 101 of 365 planned calls have been completed. Seven pharmacies (6.9%) had self-testing kits in-stock. Two pharmacies (2.5%) were able to order in the kits for the next business day. Many pharmacy staff (n=38, 37.6%) were unfamiliar with the testing kits and 11 (10.9%) gave erroneous information regarding the availability of the kits. When unable to provide a self-testing kit, pharmacies most frequently referred callers to another pharmacy (n=29, 28.7%), provided no advice (n=22, 21.8%), or were unsure how to advise the caller (n=11, 10.9%).

Conclusion:

Interim results indicate that self-testing kits are not readily accessible to consumers from community pharmacies, pharmacy staff lack familiarity with the availability of such kits and may not be able to adequately advise consumers on where to access HIV testing.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None to declare.