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BERGAMO FAST-TRACK CITY

friendly test

HIV rapid testing outside healthcare facilities: diagnostic and educational tool.

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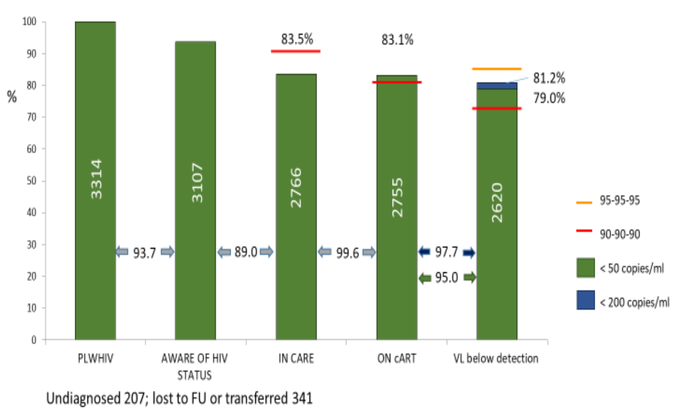
Introduction/Summary

- Treatment as prevention (TasP) is, nowadays, a cornerstone in the attempt to reduce the HIV epidemic. To be effective this measure should be expanded at the maximum, that is include and retain most PLWHIV in the cascade of care and treat them effectively. Current experiences in Italy indicate that a week knot of the care cascade is still the proportion of PLWHIV that ignore to be infected.
- At January 2020, according to our calculation the estimated number of PLWHIV in Bergamo was 3314 of whom 207 (6.5%) unaware of their infection. Although the yearly rate of new infections lowered in the last years (figure 1), the epidemic relevance of these 6.5% of PLWHIV should not be underestimated.
- A year ago, our township joined the Fast Track City Initiative (FTCI). One of the goal of our project was to expand the accessibility of HIV test outside the healthcare structures.

Figure 1 **Cascade of care, Bergamo**



Methods

- While waiting for the independent city Check Point (recently opened) a place for test, audit, counseling and self-help for PLWHIV and their relatives, we concentrated on spot events where HIV tests were performed in an anonymously and without any copay. In all cases, a rapid blood test combining both antibodies and antigens for a more sensitive diagnosis was used. Events were both directed toward the general population of our area or specifically designed for target populations.
- All persons that decided to perform a test were asked for a written inform consent and were invited to complete a 13 items standard questionnaire previously agreed among all partners in the FTCI that was used to drive the counseling.
- The service also offered a facilitated direct access with a volunteer accompaniment to the infectious disease department of the Bergamo hospital for people with a positive HIV test.

Results

- In the last year, we performed 700 HIV test in 28 different spot events. Four of these were directed toward the general population, while 22 were specifically oriented to well defined targets such as University students, young people frequenting social centers, young people at recreational facilities, men frequenting saunas or cruising venues, intravenous drug users at their gathering points.
- Overall 70% of test were performed on men. Fifty percent of subjects defined themselves as straight. Relating to sexual orientation, 50% defined themselves as heterosexual, just under 40 % as gay or lesbian and 10% as bi-sexual (figure 2).
- Interesting, for most of people performing the test the reason to perform it was curiosity (33.8%), followed by the need to perform secure sex (15%) (figure 3), while a perceived risk was a reason far less reported (only 6.7%). This seems quite in contrast with the described sexual behaviors, if we consider that 17% of tested people reported to have had, in the past year more than 10 different sexual partner either males or females (figure 4).
- The rate of positive tests was 0.28%.

Conclusion

- These preliminary data, based exclusively on spot events, indicate that curiosity is the strongest driver for people to be tested. Differently the perceived risk for HIV infection seems rather low. The test, performed under these circumstances acquires therefore a strong connotation as vehicle of info.
- We expect an increment of clients with the opening of the City Checkpoint and with a stable offer of the anonymous and free test.
- A crucial element will be the direct connection and facilitated access to the infectious disease department for a good linkage to care.
- Community-based strategies and flexible methods of offering the test can affect the low propensity to perform it and reduce the number of unaware.
- The city Checkpoint opened on June 17, 2020

Figure 3 **Why did you perform the test?**

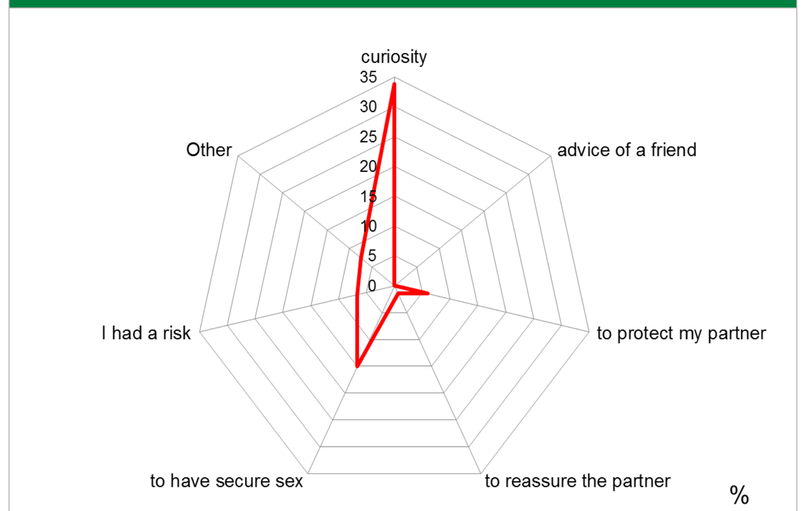


Figure 4 **Sexual abits**

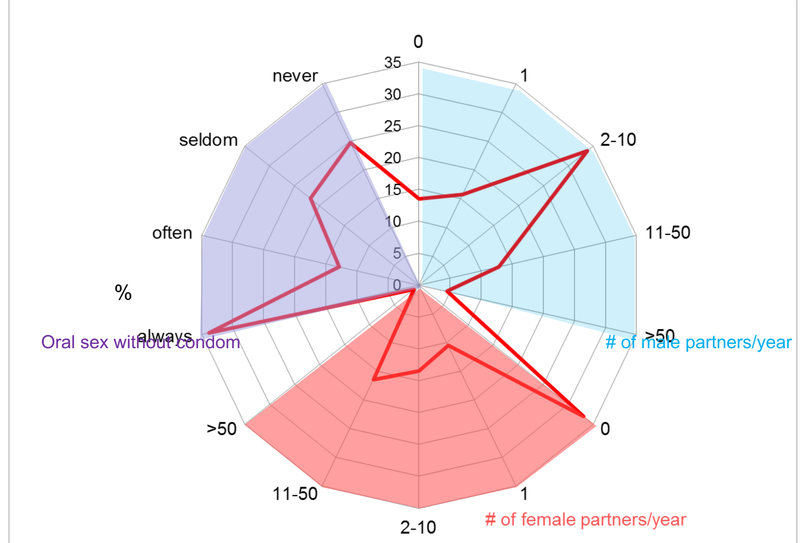
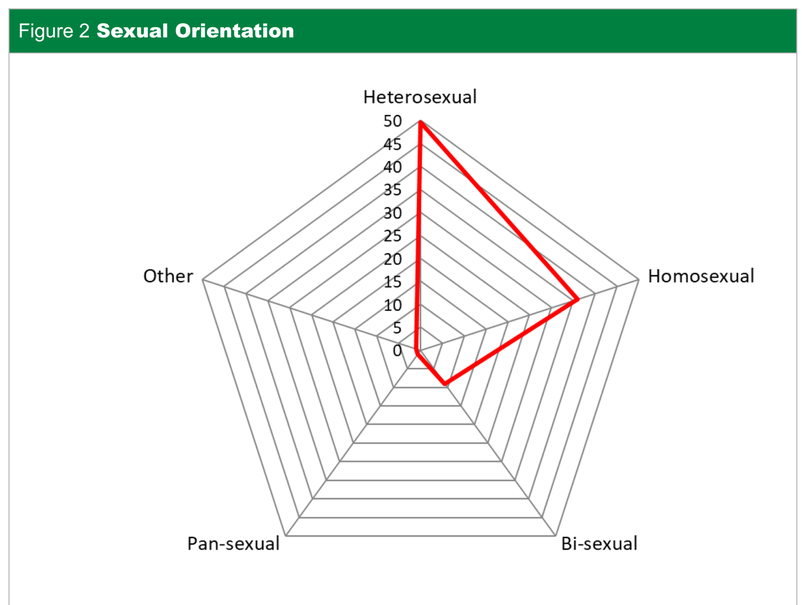


Figure 2 **Sexual Orientation**



Lotta all'Aids, apre il «check point» Informazioni e test

Aprirà oggi il «check point» in via Moroni 93, organizzato da Bergamo Fast Track City per la lotta all'Aids. «Questo progetto – spiega Franco Maggiolo, infettivologo dell'Asst Papa Giovanni XXIII di Bergamo – è un'emanazione di Fast Track City, che vede coinvolto il Comune di Bergamo in prima linea tra le città che nel mondo scelgono di combattere attivamente l'Hiv e l'Aids, oltre alle malattie sessualmente trasmesse e allo stigma legato a queste patologie. Questo è un luogo non istituzionale in cui le persone possono ricevere informazioni, supporto ed eseguire dei test per l'Hiv, per l'epatite C e la sifilide». Un check point che in Italia è il terzo in assoluto. «Si colloca in una dimensione di rete – continua l'assessore alle Politiche sociali Marcella Messina – ed è uno spazio di ascolto, accoglienza e dove eseguire il test: un luogo prezioso per la nostra città». Il progetto vede coinvolte varie realtà: il Comune di Bergamo come capofila insieme al consiglio di rappresentanza dei sindaci, l'Asst Papa Giovanni XXIII, Ats, Croce Rossa e molte altre associazioni che in modi diversi si occupano di Hive di Aids a Bergamo. «Abbiamo creduto fortemente fin dall'inizio a questa piccola magia – sottolinea Paola Pesenti Bolognini, delegata area sviluppo del comitato di Bergamo della Croce Rossa Italiana – e si è realizzata. La Croce Rossa crede e investe molto sulla salute e la prevenzione». Questo spazio inizialmente sarà aperto tutti i mercoledì dalle 18 alle 22, mentre il primo giovedì del mese dalle 20 alle 22 Arcigay Bergamo Cives dedica una serata specifica. «È un luogo aperto a chiunque – evidenzia Paolo Meli, responsabile dell'area Hiv e Aids dell'associazione Comunità Emmaus –. Si stima che nella Bergamasca 300 persone su 3.000 note non sappiano di avere l'infezione. È importante stimolare la prevenzione e promuovere comportamenti più attenti, come l'idea di sottoporsi al test. Qui si farà tutto questo e, con l'aiuto di un medico, sarà possibile fare il friendly test: rapido, anonimo e gratuito».

Il check point di via Moroni 93 sarà operativo da oggi

Alessio Malvone

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Bergamo Città dei Mille – Comune di Bergamo · Consiglio dei Sindaci Bergamo · Sistema Socio Sanitario Regione Lombardia ASST Papa Giovanni XXIII · Sistema Socio Sanitario Regione Lombardia ATS Bergamo · Cives ARCIGAY BERGAMO · Cooperativa di Bessimo onlus · Convenzione di Ginevra 22 Agosto 1864 Croce Rossa Italiana Comitato di Bergamo · la melarancia onlus · Caritas Bergamasca · comunità emmaus