Multimodal Communication Strategy Improves Syphilis Treatment after Emergency Department Screening

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Kimberly A Stanford, MD, MPH[1], Jackson MC Montgomery[2], Joseph A Mason[2], Eleanor Friedman, PhD[2], Aniruddha Hazra, MD[2]
[1]Section of Emergency Medicine, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA, [2] Section of Infectious Diseases and Global Health, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

BACKGROUND

Individuals visiting the emergency department (ED) are often difficult to reach after discharge, limiting successful management options for infections such as HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis C. As ED-based syphilis screening is increasingly recognized as a key public health strategy, identifying effective and efficient linkage-to-care approaches will be essential.

In an ED with routine, universal syphilis screening, a quality improvement project implemented multiple strategies to reach patients for result notification, including phone calls, text messages, mailed letters, and a flag for ED clinicians alerting them of unaddressed syphilis results if the patient were to re-present to the ED.

This study hypothesized that a multimodal communication strategy would result in improved reach for linkage to care efforts.

METHODS

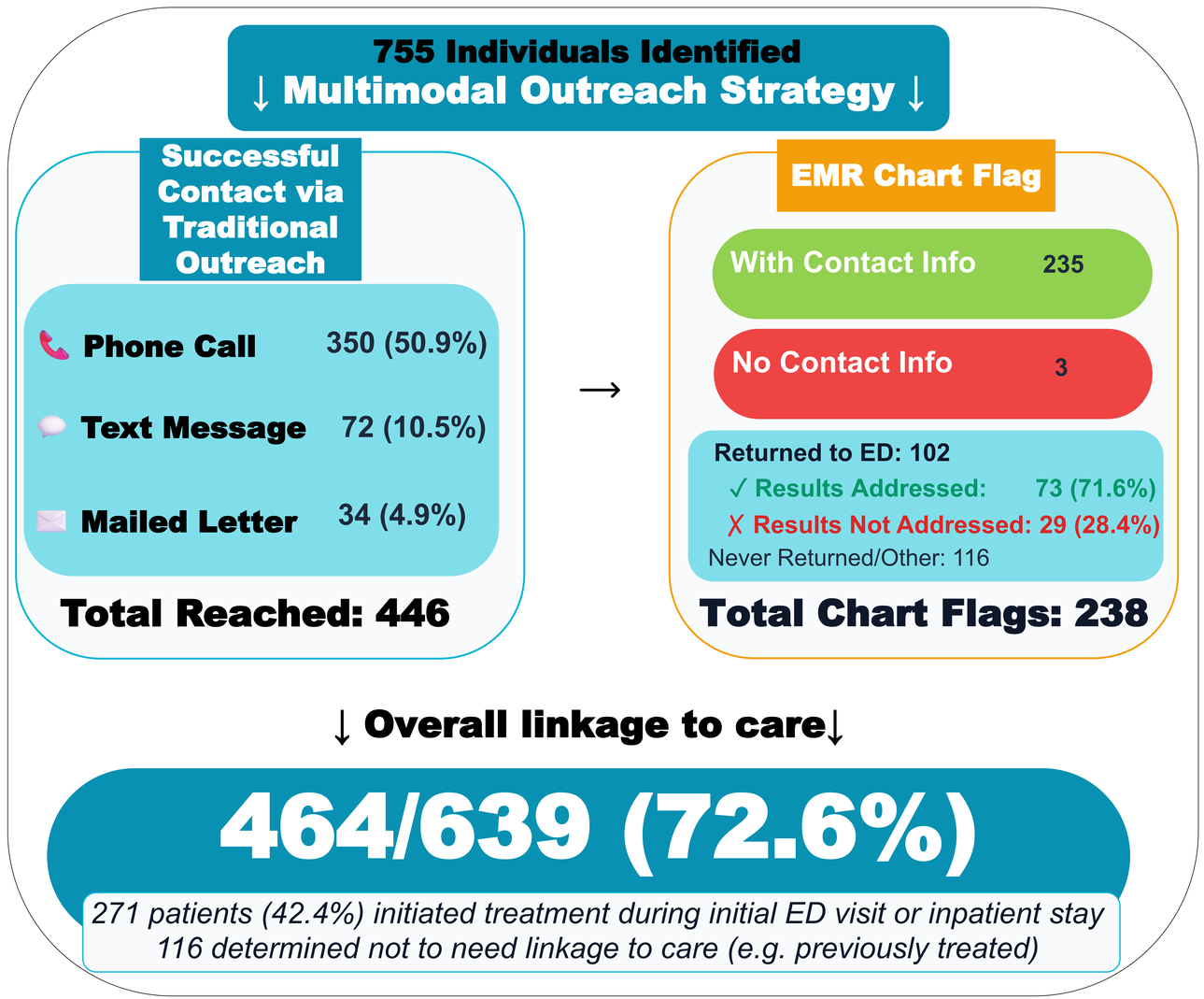
- Retrospective chart review of individuals with positive syphilis serology identified through routine ED syphilis screening from January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023, at a large, urban, academic ED.

- Any individual who required outreach was included:
  1) confirmed, untreated infection documented in the medical chart, or
  2) unknown treatment status, as determined by chart review or consultation with the local health department.

RESULTS

- 755 individuals were identified as needing syphilis treatment or additional clinical history to clarify treatment status
- 688 individuals had contact information available

A multimodal communication strategy including chart flags in the emergency department is an effective strategy for addressing a positive syphilis result in a difficult-to-reach population.



CONCLUSIONS

- A routine ED syphilis screening program can achieve excellent treatment rates (72.6%), even in the traditionally difficult to reach ED population.
- Use of multi-modal communication, especially chart flags that allow results to be addressed at the next ED visit, was highly effective in reaching even individuals without contact information.
- This strategy can be utilized to address not just syphilis but a variety of other infectious diseases and conditions that may be included in syndemic screening programs.

ADDITIONAL KEY INFORMATION

Presenting Author Contact Information:
Kimberly A. Stanford, MD, MPH
kstanford@bsd.uchicago.edu

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PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Many people who visit the emergency department are difficult to reach afterwards to let them know about test results, such as when they test positive for syphilis. This study looked at a variety of ways to reach them, and we found that using multiple methods, including phone calls, text messages, mail, and an alert that would be used if the person came back to the ED later, worked best.

CCHE The Chicago Center for HIV Elimination

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