HIV Testing? Not in My ER

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HIV testing in people at higher risk of infection did not increase between 1994 and 2004, despite specific recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), according to a new study presented at the 2007 National HIV Prevention Conference in Atlanta.

Roland Merchant, MD, MPH, from Brown Medical School in Providence, Rhode Island, and his colleague examined records from national databases of emergency-department visits for the years spanning 1993 to 2004. Specifically, Dr. Merchant sought to determine the rate of HIV testing in three groups of people where the CDC advocates screening—those exposed to blood or body fluids, cases of sexual assault and people with sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

A total of 790 million emergency-department visits were recorded for adults and adolescents between 1993 and 2004. There were no clear trends in HIV testing rates over the 11 years. HIV testing rates were highest in 1994 and 2004, when approximately 53 percent of those who should have been tested were screened for the infection, and lowest in 1995 when only 22 percent got tested. Testing rates were slightly higher in women, Hispanics, African Americans and people without private health insurance.

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