“PrEP tourism” in Bangkok and sexual risk behavior of MSM: A three- and six-month follow up study

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Background

The formal availability of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is, in many countries, limited. As a result, some men who have sex with men (MSM) obtain PrEP abroad at MSM travel destinations where PrEP is easily available and affordable. Our aim was to assess PrEP use and sexual risk-taking behavior among MSM who have sourced PrEP in Thailand ("PrEP tourists"). We investigated PrEP use and sexual risk-taking behavior during a three- (T2) and six-month (T3) follow up compared to baseline (T1).

Methods

MSM clients (n=126) of the Silom Pulse Clinic completed a survey on-site about PrEP use and sexual behavior in February-April 2017 (T1). Surveys at T2 (n=65) and T3 (n=48) were completed online. Mean age was 38 years (range: 22-70). The sample was internationally diverse: 97 participants (77.0%) did not live in Thailand and only four (3.2%) were born in Thailand. At T1, 91 participants are current or past PrEP users, 35 are interested in PrEP or starting up PrEP use.

Results

### PrEP Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PrEP regimen</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event-driven</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adherence problems among event-driven users (T1):
- Four participants (23.5%) used less than four pills per session (insufficient).
- Nine participants (52.9%) did not take two pills 2-24 hours in advance.

### Sexual and General Health at T1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of sex partners</th>
<th>Mean = 18, range = 0 - 150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIV test frequency</td>
<td>Every three months: 72 (57.1%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Every six months: 38 (30.2%)</td>
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<td>Once per year or less: 16 (12.7%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Sexual Behavior and Well-being

#### Quality of sex life (T2 and T3)

At T2, since starting PrEP use (n=57), 82.5% felt less anxious when having sex, and the same proportion reported increased quality of sex life. This remained stable between T2 and T3 (repeated measures F=1).

#### Condom use

At T1, 56.5% used condoms often or always. Lower condom use since starting PrEP was reported by 67.9% at T2 and 72.5% at T3.

#### Recreational/sex drug use

At T1, recreational drugs were used by 43 participants (34.1%) during sex. At T2, 15.8% reported increased drug use (T3: 23.5%) since starting PrEP.

### Key findings

- 16% also use antibiotics as bacterial STI prevention, thereby contributing to antibiotic resistance.
- Condom use is decreasing under PrEP.
- There appears to be two subgroups of "PrEP tourists":
  1. MSM who use PrEP daily and manage to obtain the necessary medical check-ups.
  2. MSM who use PrEP event-driven are more likely to drop out at T2/T3, and are at increased risk for HIV because of suboptimal PrEP use or lack of HIV testing.