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I got tested. Pass it on...

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, young women (approx. aged 18-24) account for more than twenty-five percent of all new HIV diagnoses. Young women need to become more knowledgeable about their susceptibility to HIV and should engage in routine testing.

Upon receiving an HIV test one must first understand how to interpret the results. As outlined in MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia, a negative ELISA test is normal, though may not always indicate that a person does not have HIV. A “window period” exists in which during this primary stage a negative result may not completely rule out HIV. Along the same lines, a positive result does not immediately indicate the person is infected with HIV. Possible reasons for a positive result include Lyme disease, syphilis and lupus. A positive Western blot test is needed to confirm an HIV infection.

There are two options for HIV testing. The first, opt-in testing, places the responsibility on the patient to actively request the test and sign a written form of consent. The second, opt-out testing, is a routine test given by the health care provider without consent. A patient can only opt-out by orally declining the test. The latter test would allow for a greater number of early diagnoses as well as treatment. It also may even help to reduce the associated stigma with HIV.

Common barriers to requesting an HIV test include a lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS, stigma, discrimination, gender inequalities and culture barriers. People remain undiagnosed because either they do not perceive themselves to be at risk or they

do not disclose their risks because of the associated stigma. Therefore, a greater reliance on opt-out testing might prove to be beneficial.

According to the World Health Organization only ten percent of people infected with HIV know their HIV status. People must be aware of their current state of health in order to make informed decisions regarding their future health. Also, early diagnosis of HIV has the potential to delay progression of the disease to AIDS, which could prolong a patient's life. In theory, new HIV infections can be reduced thirty percent per year if infected people knew their health status. People who are proactive in learning their health status are more likely to make better decisions regarding their own health. Even further, knowledge of one's own health status provides him or her with the ability to seek both treatment and support.

Valley AIDS Network and the University Health Center offer HIV testing and support. Visit the "I got tested. Pass it on..." HIV awareness Facebook group for further information.

Shannon Porter, of Valley AIDS Network, will be coming to speak to JMU about HIV awareness and free testing will be available. This event will take place on October 5, 2009 at 7 p.m. in Transitions. You have control of your life. Get tested. It costs nothing but it's worth everything.

## References

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