



## National HIV Prevention Conference

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### **[TITLE:] A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF HIV PARTNER COUNSELING AND REFERRAL SERVICES: PATIENT AND PROVIDER ATTITUDES, PREFERENCES, PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES**

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**BACKGROUND:** As an important component of the CDC's Advancing HIV Prevention Initiative, partner counseling and referral services (PCRS) notifies persons who may have been exposed to HIV infection and provides access to HIV counseling and testing services. State and local PCRS programs primarily notify partners of HIV-positive individuals through patient and/or provider referral approaches. Currently, there is no synthesis of patients, and providers, attitudes and experiences regarding PCRS. The goal of this review is to summarize patients, and providers, attitudes, preferences, and practices regarding PCRS and to identify potential negative effects. Such information can be useful in assisting service providers to increase acceptability of and participation in PCRS.

**METHODS:** Five electronic databases were systematically searched for reports related to PCRS published between 1988 and 2004. Studies were included if they focus on U.S.-based HIV PCRS and provide original data on patient and/or provider attitudes, preferences, practices and negative effects. Qualitative research methods were used to identify key themes and issues.

**RESULTS:** Of the 165 articles related to PCRS, 25 met the eligibility criteria, with 15 and 7 studies reporting patient and provider data on attitudes, preferences, and practices, respectively, and 5 providing data on negative effects. Overall, index patients are willing to self-notify partners (55% - 97%), to provide their partners' contact information to PCRS programs (79-92%), and to support the health department's role in informing their partners (78- 92%). Most patients choose to notify their partners through provider referral (59-82%). Index patients' attitudes and preferences regarding PCRS can vary according

to the patients. and their partners' gender, relationship status, sexual orientation, and drug use history. The majority of health care providers is in favor of PCRS programs (68-98%) and believes that notifying partners is an effective prevention measure (50-97%). Only 34-59% of providers refer index patients to PCRS and other HIV-related services. Limited data suggest that few index patients are emotionally and/or physically abused by their partners as a result of partner notification.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Overall, most patients have favorable attitudes and are willing to participate in both self and provider referral. However, it is important to consider differences in attitudes and preferences among specific populations when developing PCRS policies and programs. In addition, data indicate that there are inconsistent service practices and referral gaps within PCRS program networks. State and local PCRS programs need to collaborate with providers to ensure that PCRS is offered to all HIV positive patients. Further research is needed to assess the potential risks of notifying partners and to identify effective techniques to improve patient and provider participation in PCRS.



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