Delivering Sexually Transmitted Infection Education Via Text Messaging: An Evidence-Based Project

Although adolescents aged 15 to 24 years represent 25% of the sexually active population, they acquire nearly half of all the incident sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Sixty-seven percent of college students report having had sexual intercourse within the last 12 months; only half of these students usually use a protective barrier. This study seeks to determine whether a short message service (SMS) intervention aimed at college students will increase knowledge of STI prevention and reduce risky sexual behaviors. The evidence-based practice question is, “Does STI prevention education delivered via text messaging decrease the incidence of risky sexual behavior and increase knowledge of STIs among college students aged 18 to 25 years?” The Health Belief model guided study development from review of literature through intervention message development and evaluation. Research suggests that SMS is commonplace among college students and may be an important tool in sexual health promotion for younger populations. However, little evidence exists suggesting that text messages with college students can be lead to increased knowledge of STIs and decreased risky sexual behavior. Each college participate (N = 241) at a Midwestern university received 18 sexual health educational text messages over 6 weeks. Messages were adapted from a previous study, Bull’s 411, as well as developed by the author. A quasi-experimental pretest/posttest design with online data collection was used for evaluation. The survey instrument was an adaption of the Sexual Risk Survey and Bull’s 411. Data analysis was accomplished through use of paired t tests. Preliminary results show significant improvement in knowledge (STI facts, how to use a condom, screening, and prevention), likelihood of behavior change (more likely to carry a condom, use condom for oral sex, and get screened for STIs), and increased confidence in refusing to have unwanted sex. Preliminary data gave credence to SMS as an effective method of not only dispersing STI information but also increasing knowledge and likelihood of behavior change.

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