



Using Technology to Increase HIV/STI Case Finding through Pharmacies in Cambodia

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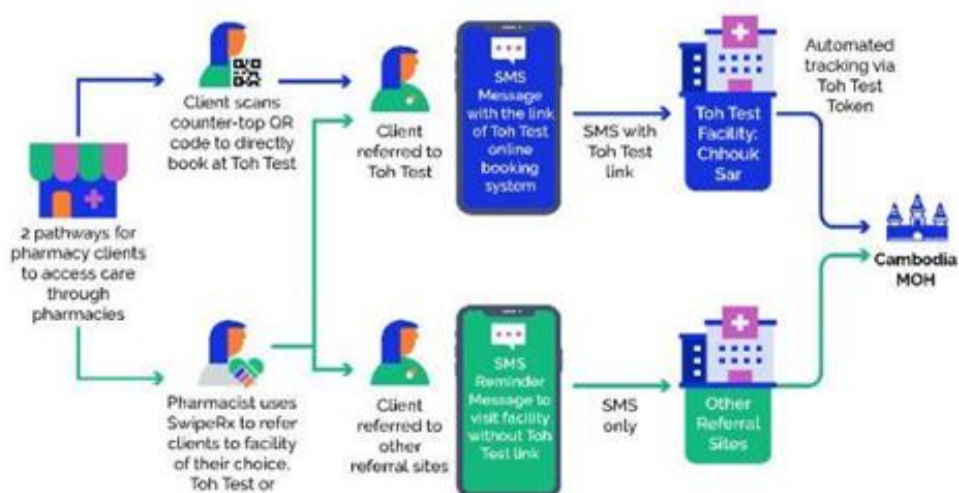
Background

Pharmacies serve as an initial source of health care for key populations at risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (HIV/STIs) in Cambodia and other low and middle-income countries. Despite this, public health programs have struggled to engage pharmacies at scale given the fragmented nature of the pharmacy channel. In this context, the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (NCHADS) in Cambodia collaborated with SwipeRx, formerly known as mClinica, to leverage a digital network of pharmacy professionals to facilitate HIV/STIs e-Referral practices.



Description

With support from the Global Fund and technical assistance from USAID EpiC and NCHADS, SwipeRx built and tested an e-Referral tool within the SwipeRx app with linkages to 1 private and 2 public health facilities equipped to provide HIV/STI diagnosis and treatment as well as PreP in Phnom Penh. Using an integrated approach, SwipeRx Cambodia enables pharmacy professionals to refer consenting clients for HIV/STI, tuberculosis and reproductive health (RH) services. With complementary support from USAID Enhancing Quality of Health Care Activity (USAID EQHA), 110 pharmacy professionals working at 89 pharmacies benefitted from online training and offline coaching to promote appropriate use of the e-Referral tool in Cambodia. In the first 12 months, 79% of the pharmacies engaged in the program used the SwipeRx e-Referral tool to refer clients for HIV/STI or other health needs. For all consenting clients, mobile phone number, gender and date of birth information was entered into SwipeRx app to facilitate follow-up. Subsequently, consenting clients referred follow-up SMS messages to encourage visits to a health facility and data from the application was transferred to a database and consolidated in a Google Data Studio dashboard used for program monitoring.



Lessons Learned

During the first 12 months-- from June 2021 to May 2022--pharmacy professionals at 70 pharmacies referred 512 consenting clients through SwipeRx. Of these, 222 clients (43% of all clients, with the remaining 57% referred for RH or TB) were referred by 56 pharmacies for HIV/STI diagnosis and care. 80% of all HIV/STI clients referred in the first year selected Chhouk Sar non-governmental health facility, and 20% selected 1 of the 2 government referral facilities included in the e-Referral system.



178 out of 222 HIV/STI referred clients were recorded as receiving referral care at 1 of the 3 health facilities included in the e-Referral system during the same 12-months. 44 pharmacy clients were diagnosed and treated for an STI including 3 clients diagnosed with HIV and 41 clients diagnosed for other STIs. Pharmacies meeting the following criteria were more likely to identify and refer clients needing HIV/STI referral care during the first year:

- Met minimum mobile access/wifi connectivity requirements
- Reported high client volume i.e. 70 or more clients/day
- Located in a high-traffic area i.e. near a market
- Focused on retail medicine sales vs sales to other pharmacies
- Staffed with pharmacy professionals committed to e-Referral based on perceived benefits for pharmacy clients and business

Conclusion

These findings highlight the potential for technology to facilitate pharmacy referrals of clients at risk of HIV and other STIs to health facilities. In addition, e-Referral monitoring data highlights the importance of selecting pharmacies that serve key populations, have owners who are supportive of e-Referral and have adequate mobile/internet access. The findings also indicate the importance of selecting referral health facilities that are accessible to key populations, offer affordable HIV/STI diagnosis and treatment services, and utilize client record-keeping systems conducive to tracking clients referred. To increase results generated through e-Referral, we recommend scaling both within and beyond Phnom Penh—in partnership with pharmacies and health facilities that are most accessible to key populations and meet other criteria described in the poster.