# **MSM and Syphilis:**

# What's the Message?

Harlan Rotblatt LAC DPH Division of HIV and STD Programs

#### Dan Wohlfeiler Building Healthy Online Communities

California Syphilis Prevention Summit January 9, 2017

## Early Syphilis Among Men in CA 2000 - 2015



## We went from 501 cases to 8,469 cases

#### During that time, we tried all this...



## Did We Blow It?



## **Failure is Relative**

#### • Did we really fail?

- Some campaigns showed increased testing
- Some campaigns coincided with morbidity dips or plateaus
- To the extent that we were unsuccessful, how much of that was due to problems of:
  - Scale or duration?
  - Changes in the landscape?
  - Our fundamental product (e.g., condoms, testing)?

## What we hope you get out of this:

- What's the question: a messaging vocabulary
  - What have we learned?
  - What's new in our landscape how must we adapt?
- Where do we go from here? (with discussion)
  - What data do we need?
  - What resources do we have, or can we get?
  - How can we collaborate to achieve needed scale?
  - How can we think strategically about messaging in a sustained way?

### A Messaging Vocabulary: the "5 P's" (The "Social Marketing Mix")

- Product: Behavior to be adopted, and its benefits
- Price: What consumer must give up to get benefits
- Place: "Channels of distribution"
  - Where target is encountered (communications)
  - Where desired behavior is available to target
- Promotion: Means of conveying the message
- Publics:
  - Target audience
  - Gatekeepers (e.g., providers, media influencers)
  - Policymakers

Some syphilis prevention messaging has focused on behavioral prevention...

### Condoms

# CARDE DON SALL YEAR LONG MREE CONDONS ALL YEAR LONG MRW.LASexSymbol.com

## **Partner Notification**





#### ...and now we have PrEP

**#PLAYSURE** 

NVC States





#### BE HIV & STI SURE

If you are HV negative, PEP is a daily pill that protects you from HV. If you have HV, froatment can keep your vivus level UNDETECTABLE and decreases the chance of passing HV to your partners. Condons add more protection against HV and help prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections.

PLAY SURE: Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health to design the right HIV and STI prevention combination for you.





#### **PTEP IS SAFE AND EFFECTIVE** CONDOMS PREVENT OTHER STDS

#### San Francisco Department of Public Health



This pill is changing HIV prevention. Take it once a day to stay HIV negative.



#### But mostly, it's been testing and treatment.



Stop the Sores, LA County, 2002-2005, also Portland, Philadelphia



Underneath the t-shirt are syphilis rashes.

It's not a good look.

Even if you don't have symptoms, you could still have sympilis

Stay healthy and active. Get checked for syphilis

Search



Healthy Penis, San Francisco, Cleveland, Seattle, Santa Clara, Palm Springs, San Jose, Winnipeg, 2002-2005, 2009

#### SyphilisTestNY.org

I have syphilis

I Have Syphilis, New York, 2016 -

Find confidential testing near you

Enter ZIP Code or City, State

## Why is "Testing" our Main Product?

- We think most sexual risk-reduction messages won't work
- Clear, simple, message
- Measurable
- In theory, effective (curable, stops transmission)

# Explicit and Implicit Benefits Used in Recent campaigns



#### Being cured / disease free (in contrast with HIV)

#### Prevent serious complications like neurosyphilis. "Check Yourself" (LA County)

Left untreated, syphilis can cause brain damage and permanent vision loss in less than a year.

Get a syphilis test every 6 months.

ReallyCheckYourself.org

CHECK YOURSELF. Don't assume you're getting off clean.

Left untreated, syphilis can cause

brain damage and permanent vision loss in less than a year. Get a syphilis test every 6 months. ReallyCheckYourself.org

#### Health protection for HIV-positive men.

Getting syphilis can be especially devastating for anybody with HIV. Your viral load shoots up. Your CD4 count drops. You just made it harder for your meds to work. Worse, if you don't get treated fast, you put yourself at risk for early brain and nerve damage.

You can get syphilis through oral or anal sex. Fortunately, it's curable.

Getting syphilis can be especially devestating for anybody with HIV. Your viral load shoots up. Your CD4-count drops. You just made it harder for your meds to work. Worse, if you don't get treated fast, you put yourself at risk for early brain and nerve damage.

You can get syphilis through oral or anai sex. Fortunately, It's curable. You've worked hard to maintain your health. Don't let one syphilis infection mess it all up. Get tested for syphilis every 6 months (every 3 months if you're HIV+). Really CheckYourself.org

**Grizzly night?** 

**CHECK YOURSELF.** 

#### Prevent getting or transmitting HIV.

#### "I have syphilis," NY, 2016, website FAQ

#### Syphilis and HIV

If you are HIV negative...

Syphilis causes open sores. If you're exposed to HIV while you have sores, the risk of an HIV infection increases. Anyone diagnosed with syphilis should also be tested for HIV. HIV-negative people diagnosed with a new syphilis infection should seek education on PrEP. Anyone at high-risk for HIV can benefit from prevention services, routine medical care, access to condoms, and ongoing screenings.

If you are HIV positive...

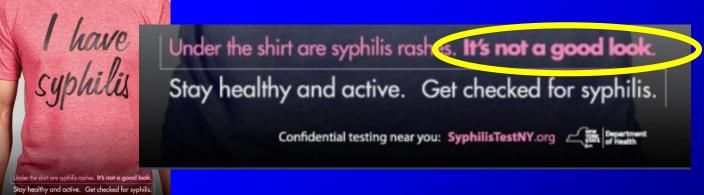
Someone with both HIV and syphilis is more likely to transmit HIV to sex partners. Anyone with HIV who is sexually active should be tested for syphilis at least annually, and more frequently depending on their sexual practices.

Under the shirt are syphilis rashes. It's not a good look. Stay healthy and active. Get checked for syphilis.

#### Prevent unsightly symptoms

Confidential testing near you: SyphillisTestNY.org





### Building a healthy gay community

#### "Healthy Penis", San Francisco



#### "We All Test", San Diego



#### Others depending on you? "Dogs are Talking," San Francisco, 2007-08



"Man! People say I look like my guy, from fleas. He but you two even needs a blood have the same rash..." test to find out

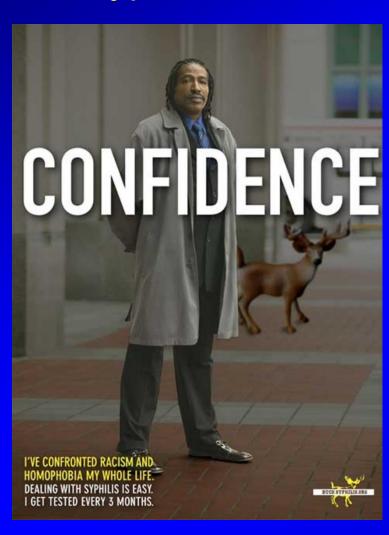
"Hey, mine's from fleas. He what he's got."

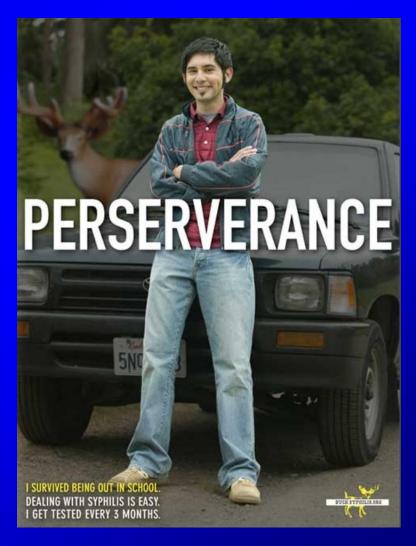
#### Or...routinizing sexual health (also = freedom, intimacy, sexual vigor?)



"The Drama Downunder," Australia

What's the benefit / emotional connection here? "Buck Syphilis," San Francisco, 2006





#### Benefit / connection? "Check it out" Australia, 2004



No matter where you're from, and what you're into, if you're having site, you should have a regular sexual health check. Some STIs sexually transmitted infections) don't show symptoms – so you could have one and not know it.

To find out more, visit a doctor for a private and confidential check up.

For information and referral about sexual health checks call AID5LINE on 1800 133 392 or go to www.checkitout.net.au.



- March 1996

Benefit / connection? "Attack of the Cursed Syphilis," Toronto, 2010, also Canada nationally



## Meanwhile, outside public health:







# How big is the threat in the eyes of our audience?

"What's this obsession with syphilis? It's more easily curable than the common cold." - Australia\*

"An acceptable part of being sexually active..." - Los Angeles\*\*

\*McCann, Gray, et al, STD, 2011 \*\*Plant, Stahlman, et al, Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2015





## Do we agree with our audience?

- Why do we actually care about syphilis in MSM?
  - Complications?
    - Prior evidence of increased neuro in HIV-positive men
    - Recent ocular syphilis alert
    - Numerous exotic reports
    - But -- little clinical observation (that we know of...)
  - Bridging  $\rightarrow$  Congenital
  - HIV facilitation
- Why do we expect MSM to care?

# How do landscape changes affect our product?

- The MSM syphilis outbreak was driven by a new landscape in 1999-2000, including:
  - HAART
  - Internet sites for hooking up
  - Meth
- New changes since then:
  - Even easier hook-up apps
  - Better and more widely used HAART
  - PrEP: Less HIV risk, more STD testing access
  - Other changes in health care access (ACA?)

## What's the PRICE of our product?

Condoms:
– intimacy, etc.

- Testing:
  - -Money
  - -Time
  - -Confidentiality
  - -Hassle
  - -Meaning of result?

## Who are our PUBLICs?

- MSM: how are we segmenting our main target?
  - HIV status
  - Language
  - Ethnicity
  - Risk? (e.g., users of dating Apps, PrEP clients)
  - Syphilis history / clustering
- Do new media decrease the payoff of segmentation?
- Others:
  - Providers?
  - Community organizations and advocates?
  - Media influencers
  - Gatekeepers: porn, electronic media sites, dating apps, etc.
  - Funding agencies?

# What's the PLACE where our product (behavior) can be practiced?

- Testing:
- Risk reduction behavior
- Partner contact

## What's the PLACE of our message?

- Changing information landscape:
  - Traditional ad spaces: outdoor, gay press, radio, TV
  - Dating apps
  - Websites
  - Social media
  - YouTube channels
  - Blogosphere
- Others:
  - Clinic waiting rooms (HIV care, PrEP)
  - Other venues: bars, gyms, bathhouses, etc.
  - Porn?



December holiday promotion in gay bars: Keychain flashlights with "check him out" slogan



#### YouTube: Davey Wavey Gay Condom Party

## What's the PROMOTION? How do we get the message out?

- Paid ads and materials
- Publicity / free media / editorial
- Spokespersons (and their social networks)
- Digital content (and those networks)
- Electronic reminders (text, email)
- Contests
- Events

### Big Free Promotion Examples of Earned (Free) Media from "Stop the Sores"





Daily Show, "Sore Loser" 7/23/02

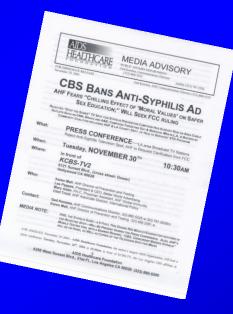
YouTube.com

## Generating your own news coverage: Stop the Sores TV Ban Press Release

#### Nov. 2004:

- Campaign community partner AHF protested CBS refusal to show Stop the Sores cable ad.
- Refusal expected, response planned in advance.
- Huge media response.





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## We're not the only messengers



<u>Some</u> young African American gay men report taking cues from the kind of porn they watch.\*

Growing proportion of gay porn producers making bareback films (30/41)\*\*

> \*Arrington-Sanders, R., Arch Sex Behav 2015. \*\* Str8upgayporn, 2015

# What did we achieve with all that?

- Clear evidence of capacity to build brands
- Clear evidence of capacity to increase syphilis awareness
- Clear evidence of <u>some</u> capacity to increase testing
- Some ecologic correlation with morbidity dips and plateaus (highly speculative, and combined with many other efforts)

# **Problems Showing Testing Impact**

Campaign	Pub. Date	Methods	Results	Testing Effect
Check-It-Out, Victoria, Australia, <u>2004 (</u> 3 segmented campaigns)	Guy 2009	Lab records, MGCPS convenience sample, 2004- 2006, n=2,794-3,394	Over three surveys, no changes in syphilis testing, but increase in other STD tests, past 12 mos. Lab records showed no testing increase either.	No increased syphilis testing.
Dogs Are Talking, SF, <u>2007</u>	Stephens 2008	Street intercept, n=289	Only one-third recall. No overall effect on testing. But effect on HIV+ men.	P<0.031 (HIV+ men only)
Attack of the Cursed Syphilis, Totonto, <u>2010</u>	Canada ACT Report 2011	Pre/Post Online surveys, n=871 and 610, 71% and 74% MSM	66% recall. Increased knowledge – syphilis and testing access. Limited increase in testing (ever or in past 6-12 mos.). But clinics did report increases.	Survey: limited increase. One clinic: >78% increase.

## More Problems Showing Testing Impact

Campaign	Pub. Date	Methods	Results	Testing Effect
Drama Downunder Australia, <u>2008-09</u>	Pedrana 2012	Online surveys convenience / snowball cohort, n=295; clinic data	86% campaign recall. Aided recall associated with increased syphilis testing, last 6 mos, but NOT unaided. Significant increases in clinic testing.	1.6 PR (aided recall only)
Drama Downunder Australia, <u>2010-14</u>	Wilkinson 2016	Online surveys convenience / snowball cohort, n=242 (completed 3 surveys); clinic data	71-78% campaign awareness, but only 43- 53% slogan recall. No impact on syphilis testing; among HIV+ men actual decline in syphilis testing trend, possibly due to clinic practice changes.	No change in HIV neg. men, decline in prior increase in testing among HIV+ men.

# Evidence of Increased Testing from Social Marketing Campaigns for MSM

Campaign	Pub. Date	Methods	Results	Testing Effect
Healthy Penis, SF, <u>2002-03</u> (Also 2004-05)	Montoya 2005, Ahrens 2006	Street intercept survey, n=244	80% campaign recall. "Unaided awareness" (33% of sample) = more testing, last 6 mos	3.2x
Stop the Sores, LAC, 2002-03, <u>2004</u>	Plant 2010	Street intercept survey, n= 277	71% campaign recall. Aware of campaign = more testing, last 6 mos	1.83x
Check Yourself, LAC, <u>2009</u>	Plant 2014	Time-location survey, n=306	88% campaign recall. "Confirmed awareness" of campaign (knew it was about syphilis) = more testing, last 6 mos	6.37x

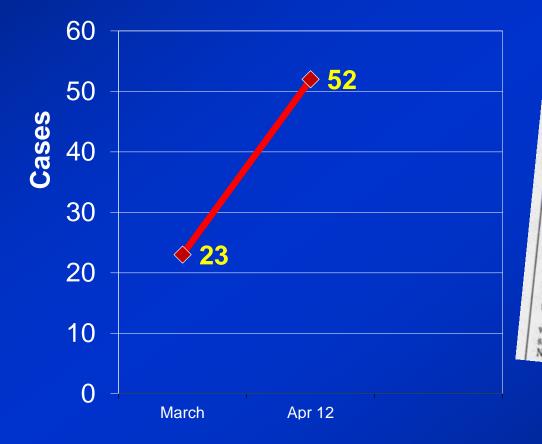
# Key Features of these campaigns

- Formative research
- Extensive involvement of gay community
- Street outreach
- Multi-media
- Inter-jurisdictional collaboration (STS, HP)
- Formal evaluation, shared results in peer journals
- Substantial scale:
  - Stop the Sores ~ 3 yrs
  - Check Yourself 3+ yrs
  - Healthy Penis 3+ years

## The Perils of Insufficient Scale / Dosage

### Syphilis Cases in Men L.A.County, 2000

as reported by the L.A. Times



#### WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 2000 B7 Board Votes \$1.5 Million to Fight Syphilis Outbreak Health: Supervisors the 120 syphilis cases reported in approve campaign to the county involved gay men. The recent cases involve men promote safe sex. from West Hollywood, Holly-Advocates fear increased wood, Silver Lake and Long Beach, officials said. About 60% spread of AIDS. of the men have the virus that causes AIDS, which officials say By NICHOLAS RICCARDI is cause for additional alarm. TIMES STAFF WRITER Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, whose Westside district has Responding to an outbreak of been the site of much of the out-52 syphilis cases among prebreak, reminded Fielding that dominantly gay men with multithe county has the power to orple sexual partners, the Los Ander sex clubs and bathhouses to geles Board of Supervisors provide condoms to patrons, and approved a \$1.5-million emereven to close the establishments gency campaign Tuesday to if necessary. combat the disease and promote "I don't know anyone here who wants to shut them down," Health advocates fear that the Yaroslavsky said, "but . . . if syphilis outbreak signifies inthey don't cooperate to try to creasingly risky sexual behavior curtail the spread of [sexually on the part of those who have transmitted diseases] in their escontracted it, which could intablishments, at some point crease the spread of AIDS. Some there's going to be no choice." advocates criticized the county Fielding said the bathhouses for not moving quickly enough and sex clubs had been highly to stem the behavior. cooperative and said the county "If we don't do something fast wanted to work with them and we'll have a really big mess," ensure they voluntarily distribsaid Kathy Watt of the Van uted condoms before taking le-Ness Recovery House. "It'll gal action that could be tangled up in the courts.

#### Syphilis Cases in Men, L.A.County, 2000 as reported by the L.A. Times





## Health Dept. Budgets for Advertising Online (n=92) BHCO Survey

#### 2015

- Min = \$200
- Max = \$100,000
- Total = \$687,567
- 25 HDs

### 2016

- Min = \$200
- Max = \$500,000
- Total = \$1,750,938
- 34 HDs

# **Other Campaign Impact Metrics?**

- Awareness / knowledge
- Clinic visits
- Web metrics (page clicks, views, etc.)
- Media discussion
- Other feedback

#### Comments...

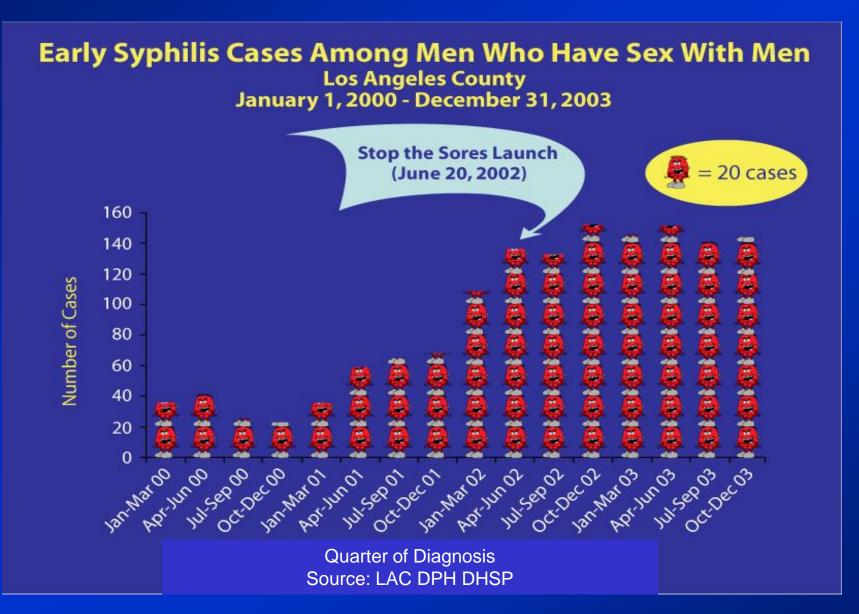
- "They loved the flashlights."
- "...loved the flashlights."
- •"... really liked the flashlights."
- •"I have a flashlight on my keychain now."
- •"I'm still using my flashlight on my keychain."
- "One guy wanted one after we ran out because his straight girlfriend wanted one."
- "We get a lot of bar gimmicks. This was a real good one, a big hit."

Bar staff survey comments,

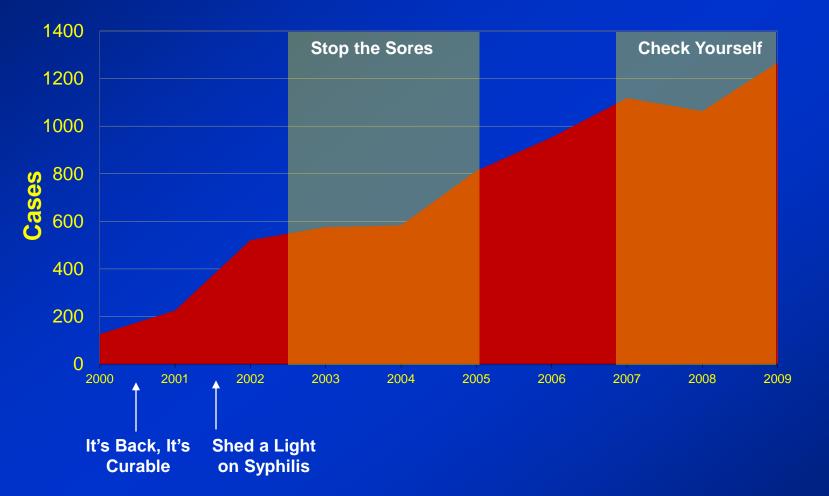
"Shed Some Light on Syphilis", n=12

## The Ultimate Metric?

## **Ultimate Metric: Impact on Morbidity?**



## Early Syphilis Cases among MSM / MSMW L.A. County, 2000 - 2009



Sources:1 LAC DHS STD Program Early Syphilis Surveillance Summary, Cases Reported as of July, 20052 LAC DPH STD Program Early Syphilis Surveillance Summary 2010, Cases Reported as of May 31, 2010

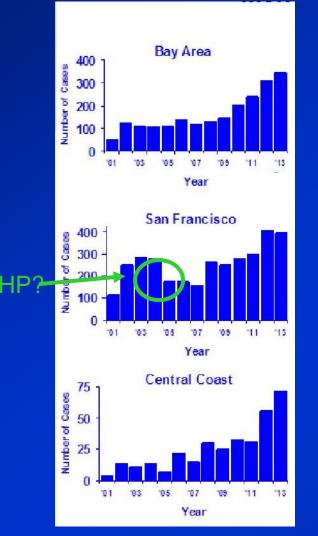
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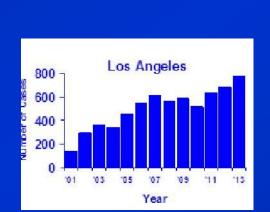


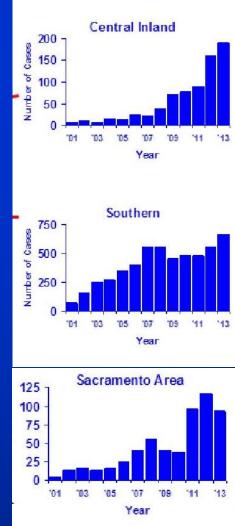


## Are trends local or general?

#### Primary and Secondary Syphilis Cases in MSM, by Region and Year CA, 2001-2013\*



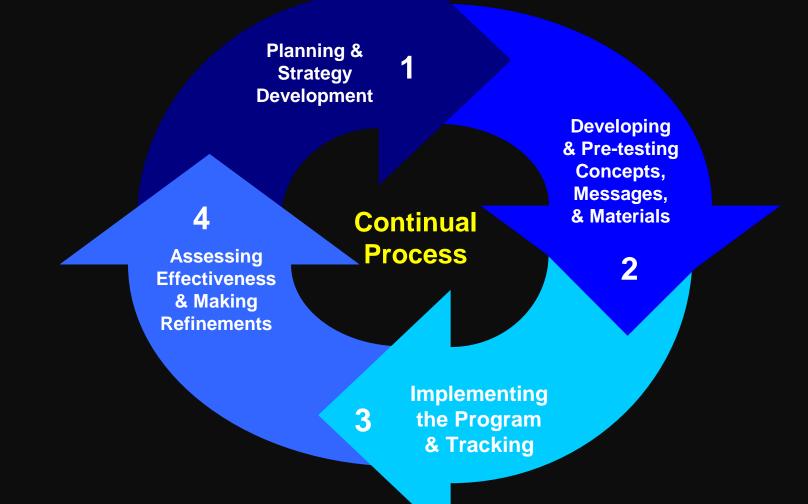




\* Source: CA STD Control Branch, in 2013/2014 STD Surveillance Data: US, California and Los Angeles County Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Division of HIV and STD Programs January, 2016

## Where Do We Go From Here?

## Stages in Developing Social Marketing Messages and Campaigns



# Planning / 1

- Not just one talk: need ongoing strategic effort
- What is our PRODUCT?
- Who are our PUBLICS and segments?
- What scale are we prepared to attempt?
- How engage audience in process?
- Who are our partners?
- Do we have a theoretical model?

# Planning / 2

- What can we do together save \$\$\$, achieve scale?
  - Joint campaigns to pool resources, increase saturation?
  - Strategy sharing
  - Research and formative data collection
  - Media production
  - Evaluation

## **Development and Pre-Testing**

- Legacy of experience
- Address landscape changes

Top reasons MSM aware of Healthy Penis campaign still not tested, n= 102 (Montoya, 2005)

- Low or no risk (22%)
- Monogamous (14%)
- No symptoms, feel healthy (12%)
- No need (12%)
- Not getting around to it (9%)
- Tested > 6 mos ago (7%)
- Not convenient (4%)

# Attitudes of MSM with syphilis 2x or more in last 2 years, n=19 (Plant, 2015)

- Lots of stigma: "dirty," "nasty," "more [stigma] than HIV"
- Did not discuss with partners or peers
- Many concerned about perceived health effects
- Most not worried enough to change risk behavior (curability)
- Sense of fatalism about being re-infected
- Only some named special risks they thought led to infection:
  - Partying more than usual
  - Unemployment  $\rightarrow$  more sex
  - Meth
  - Bipolar

## Pre-testing, Re-Testing: American Men's Internet Survey (AMIS)

- Survey of MSM in US
- Objective: Assess trends in HIV risk behavior, use of HIV testing services, STD testing and access to prevention services
- Goal of ~10,000 completed surveys per cycle (year)
- Funded by MAC AIDS Fund
- Based in Emory University

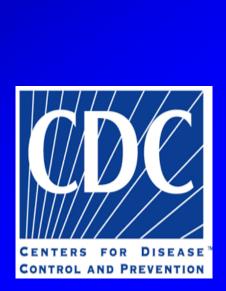


# New Options for Creative Development and Testing (LAC)

- Solicit numerous approaches through design contests
  - Access developers from target audience
  - Widens pool of talent and range of ideas
  - Can receive many approaches quickly
  - Low-cost way to enlist audience and get new ideas
- Assess top submissions through designated reviewers
- Test top 10-15 ideas with audience focus groups
- Partner artists with other resources as needed
- (Product issues must be built in to contest parameters)

# Implementation and Tracking

















# dudesnude



REAL MEN-NO ATTITUDE



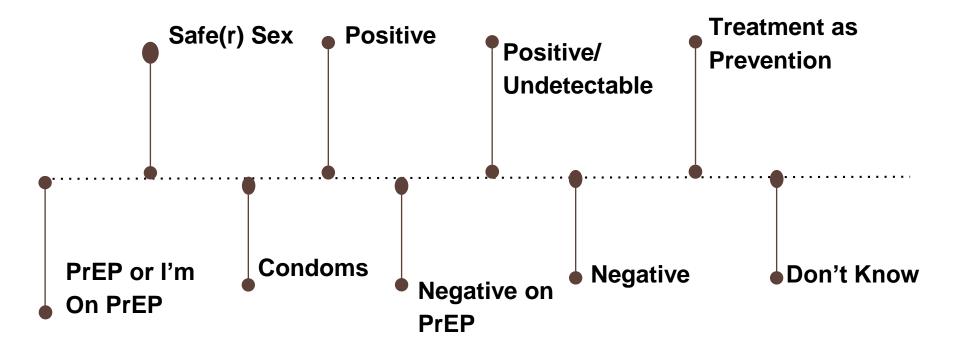


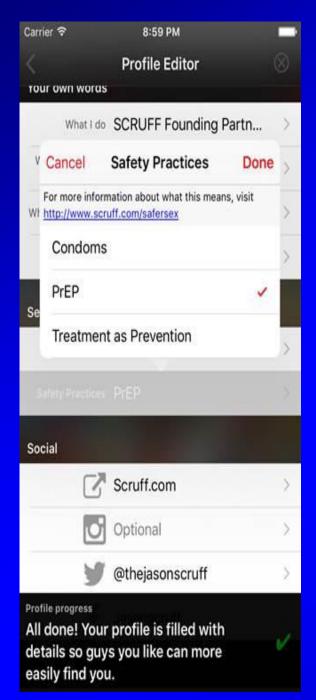




## **Profile Option Challenges**

What do they mean? Self or Partner? Status or Strategy?



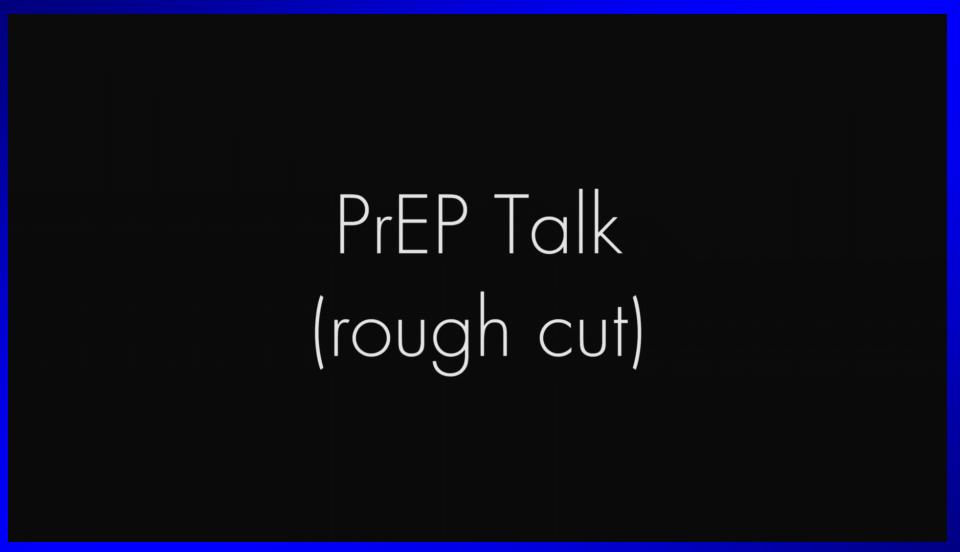




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#### **DaddyHunt Web Series**

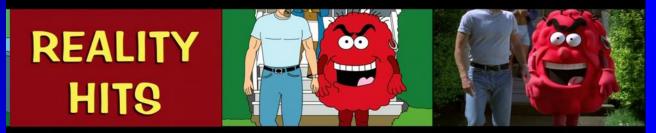


#### DaddyHunt Web Series – "Choices"

#### DaddyHunt Web Series – "Butt and Throat"

## (Ongoing) Assessment and Refinement

#### Stop the Sores, 2004







## Philip Morris spent 45 years killing men with this guy.

What are we prepared to do to keep them healthy ?

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