Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Testing and Treatment: An Overview of the Appointment Process

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Provision of STI testing and treatment is the new best practice for pregnancy medical clinics striving to remain relevant in the arena of sexual health, as clinics such as Planned Parenthood continue to gain momentum. In order to provide the most comprehensive STI care, PMC's should offer full STI screening, which may include an STI exam appointment with a mid-level provider or higher. In this article, I will break down the different appointments that a typical patient might have and explain the purpose behind each appointment.

The first patient appointment is for STI screening, at which time the patient meets with a nurse. The nursing assessment includes screening for signs or symptoms the patient is experiencing, known exposure to STIs, previous STI testing/treatment and pertinent vaccination information. The sexual health risk
assessment includes questions about the number of partners a patient has had in their lifetime, sexual exposure to same sex partners or opposite sex partners, forms of sex (vaginal, oral or anal), as well as exploration of issues like substance abuse/use, prostitution and sexual assault or abuse. This section can be difficult to maneuver through, as we assess risk factors in order to determine recommendations for testing without making our patients feel condemned or judged. We serve those who have been sexually assaulted or abused and those that have hit rock bottom. Some simply need someone to listen to them, while others need to be reminded of the risks their lifestyle choices are creating for them. Each patient’s story is unique and while there are those individuals who simply want an STI screening, there are also those patients who recognize their need to make a lifestyle change. Regardless of the reason for their appointment, we have the unique opportunity to love this person as Christ loves them and remind them that they have the ability to change their trajectory moving forward. Remember, the goal of providing STI services is to not only test and treat for STIs, but to educate our patients about lifestyle changes which will positively impact their future, such as abstinence outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage.

This first appointment concludes with specimen collection. Practicing under clear medical policy and procedure we use the patient’s symptoms to guide priority of testing and the patient’s risk assessment to guide recommended testing. Clinics should provide a full range of testing which includes Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, HSV 1 & 2, HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, Syphilis, Bacterial Vaginosis, Trichomonas, and Urinalysis (1). These tests are collected through urine, swab specimens, or blood draw.

The second appointment is a shorter results appointment. This appointment allows the nurse to go over test results, provide education, implement treatment, and discuss recommended follow up. Often, this appointment is a turning point for patients in making positive, lasting changes in their behavior.

The third and final appointment is an exam appointment with a mid-level provider or physician. This exam is for patients needing a Pap and HPV screening, genital warts HPV treatment, or a physical exam when symptoms are present and STI results are negative. In order to accommodate these exams, a mid-level provider or physician must be recruited. Many clinics utilize Nurse Practitioners, Certified Nurse Midwives, Physician
Assistants, or Physicians who volunteer 2-4 hours a month to see patients. One or two providers volunteering for a minimal amount of time can allow your clinic to have exams available for patients on a weekly basis. Mid-level providers fall under the supervision and direction of the Medical Director, and adhere to the medical policy and procedures and standing orders already in place. These exam appointments range from 15 minutes to 30 minutes, depending on the type of appointment needed. The STI exam is a critical part of providing STI care as it allows us to expand the care of our patients without losing them to competition.

Adding STI services can seem overwhelming, but the positive effect on your clinic can’t be understated. You will see greater community impact in promoting positive sexual health education, prevention of future STIs and unplanned pregnancies, and the ability to provide a broader scope of care to the men and women you aim to serve. When you broaden your scope of care, you extend the reach of your clinic to those who need it most, and provide a positive alternative to the men and women in your care.

For a comprehensive workshop on adding STI services to your clinic, visit hopepregnancyministries.org.

Resources


Medical Insights Partnership

The Medical Insights Journal is a collaborative partnership effort between Women’s Health Network National (WHNN) and PMC Network (PMCN).

Contact WHNN for more information regarding workflow, patient load, and available product recommendations. WHNN will have an RDMS’ or Medical Director contact you. www.whnnational.com
PMCN is a membership-based organization offering real world education and support for pregnancy medical clinics. PMCN recognizes that PMCs are health care facilities with unique needs, and they assist in securing the future of your organization by helping you meet or exceed federal and state regulations and best practices.

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Kristen began leading the nursing team at Clear Choice Clinic in June of 2015. A native of Wisconsin, Kristen received her Bachelor’s degree in nursing at Viterbo University and a Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies from Alliance Theological Seminary. She served as a missionary at the Women and Children’s Hospital in Koutiala, Mali, returning in 2014 to marry her childhood friend, T.J. Kristen and her husband have two children, are actively involved in Fellowship Church in Columbia Falls, and enjoy outdoor activities including skiing, hiking and sports.