Whether or Not You Expect It, Patients Turn to Urgent Care for STD/STI Treatment

After a decade of decline, recent years have seen a resurgence in sexually transmitted infections like chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. It's a near certainly that patients seeking testing and treatment for these and other conditions will show up at your urgent care center.

Urgent care centers provide an important niche for STD (or STI) testing and treatment, especially as funding is cut to public health programs across the country. The term "STD" is used when symptoms manifest while "STI's" may not show symptoms. Thus, public health officials tend to prefer the term "STI."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate nearly 20 million new sexually-transmitted infections happen in the U.S. each year. The majority affect 15 to 24-year-olds.

Patients often seek out services for these conditions in urgent care because they're embarrassed about going to their primary care provider, or they don't have one. Sexually transmitted conditions typically become concerns when an individual engages in behavior they later regret or when they find out they've been betrayed by someone else, so for the patient, the experience is often emotionally charged. They thus see a stigma around seeking care at the public health department, campus health center, or even Planned Parenthood. Urgent care centers offer a confidential and respectful setting for treatment.

"As healthcare providers, we strive to treat patients for an array of illnesses in a

judgment-free environment," said Rebecca Powell, PA-C, who works in the [ZipClinic Urgent Care](#) locations in Denver, Aurora, and Westminster.

In August, STD testing accounted for as much as 5 percent of patient visits at the Colorado locations. Because of its proximity to a young, upwardly rising urban demographic, the Denver clinic had the highest percentage of those patient visits.

Recognizing the sensitivity of these types of patient encounters, ZipClinic staff offer additional privacy to patients as they complete paperwork. As with any patient encounter, the reason for their visit is kept confidential throughout the visit. And for more sensitive matters the providers sometimes have a patient return to the clinic to discuss test results and provide additional resources to better understand a diagnosis.

"Many of our patients have not established care with a primary care physician or are unable to schedule a same-day appointment," Powell said. "When these patients need testing, we are a quick and easy way to be seen. Unlike many other STD-specific clinics in our area, we offer same-day testing with no appointment necessary."

Here are a couple examples of ways urgent care centers can promote these types of services.

> FastMed Urgent Care, one of the largest urgent care chains in the country, promotes STD testing on its website with the following: "While many people believe that the symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are easy to spot, some STDs have little to no symptoms. If you have questions about STDs, prevention, or where to get an STD test near you, FastMed Urgent Care is eager to help."

> UrgentWay Walk-in Medical Center, with locations in New York City, made an infographic about the rise in cases of Syphilis. The center has information on its website to educate patients about one of the fastest growing STDs in the country – one that is curable but can be fatal if left untreated.

Whether you expect it or not, experience shows that patients experiencing STD symptoms will show up at your urgent care center. Outreach for to the community about STD and STI testing and treatment at your urgent care center should be a priority. The services play an important role in public health, and can contribute to the bottom line for your center.

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