



GMHS ANNUAL REPORT 2019



**GAY MEN'S
HEALTH SERVICE**

The Gay Men's Health Service (GMHS) reached its 27th year of operation on October 6th 2019 and continues to be the only statutory Public Health Service in Ireland for gay and bisexual men, men who have sex with men (MSM) and the trans community. In that time the service has facilitated over 120,000 patient visits. 2019 was a very busy year at GMHS indicating that the service is effective at targeting those who are most in need of STI screening, treatment and follow-up. The GMHS is funded and managed by HSE Community Healthcare East and is centrally involved in strategies and actions to reduce the incidence of HIV and STI's in the MSM community and beyond. Funding was also allocated for the asymptomatic screening clinic PrEP clinic and the HPV vaccination clinic by Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP) through Health and Wellbeing.

In Ireland in 2019 of the newly recorded HIV cases MSM accounted for a significant proportion according to the HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC). The high rates of HIV within the MSM population along with the significant increase in other STIs highlights the importance of a targeted service for MSM. In 2019 according to the HPSC of the reports in sexually transmitted infections (STI's) a large proportion were in MSM where mode of transmission was known. It also demonstrates that addressing these concerns in a holistic and comprehensive manner is an important approach as outlined in the National Sexual Health Strategy and action plan. The strategy will run from 2015 – 2020.

The GMHS has a vital role in promoting and delivering this service and demand constantly increasing. The popularity of the clinic and the significant cohort of MSM attending from all parts of Ireland (approximately 15% reside outside Dublin) demonstrate that the HSE is fulfilling some of the indicators from the National Sexual Health Strategy. In 2019, 1176 men attended GMHS for the first time and a significant percentage had never tested previously for HIV (29%) or other STIs (37%) proving that the continuation of and increased access to the GMHS STI checkpoint is vital. The delivery of the clinical service is made possible by the commitment and work of the staff, which is widely appreciated and acknowledged by Health Service Executive Management and the MSM community.

Development of a PrEP monitoring and prescription service

A pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) monitoring clinic was established in mid-November 2017 to facilitate people already accessing PrEP on line or interested in being assessed for suitability to consider starting PrEP. Many studies have demonstrated that PrEP, when taken correctly, is highly effective at preventing acquisition of HIV. International uptake of the drug (alongside other HIV prevention measures) by MSM in areas with high HIV prevalence such as London has seen dramatic decreases in HIV diagnosis. Service users

attending the GMHS PrEP clinic have a rapid HIV test as well as a full STI screen, kidney function monitoring, and a detailed consultation regarding PrEP including suitability, side effects, dosing options, access to prescription and importance of 3 monthly screening. This has expanded STI testing services to 4 times weekly. This clinic has proved extremely popular and is a brave and progressive step in HIV prevention in this cohort. With the availability of generic PrEP in pharmacies in Ireland at the end of 2017 this clinic grew and developed in 2018 catering for over 1,000 patients that year and in addition providing prescriptions to attendees to purchase the medication at community pharmacies. The clinic grew further in 2019 when PrEP became available free of charge and GMHS is hoping to expand this service further to include a second weekly PrEP clinic in 2020.

HPV vaccine clinic

A HPV vaccine clinic was introduced in April 2017 and continued into 2019 to deliver a targeted vaccination service to MSM age 45 and younger. Funding was allocated to the service from SHCPP to facilitate a part time HPV vaccine nurse to set up the service and monitor attendance ensuring those expressing interest completed the course. In 2019 the clinic administered over 2,600 HPV vaccines. This invaluable preventative service has encouraged a number of people to access services, testing and treatment who may not have done so in the past while also providing education and support for this vulnerable cohort of patients and making every contact and intervention count.

STI Checkpoint at GMHS

The GMHS STI Checkpoint at The Meath Primary Care Campus, Dublin¹ is for all men who have sex with men (MSM) and the trans population. A multi-disciplinary team provide free, friendly and confidential clinics on Monday afternoon, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and Thursday mornings. The weekly attendance of over 230 men highlights the popularity and need for such a service. This is also enhanced by a satellite clinic on the third Saturday of every month at Outhouse LGBT Community Centre. In 2019 there were 11 outreach sessions at Outhouse with 223 people availing of the testing an average of 20 per clinic with a 16% pick up of STI's. Two nurses run this STI Checkpoint along with the Gay Switchboard Ireland volunteers, whose support is invaluable as they 'meet and greet' all attendees making the experience more friendly and pleasant for those attending.

Enhancing Access to HIV and STI Testing 2019

There is an asymptomatic Nurse led screening service available for patients at all 4 GMHS clinics and at the outreach STI service at Outhouse LGBT Community Centre, Capel St., Dublin (3rd Saturday of each month)

¹ -<http://hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/sexhealth/gmhs/clinics/>

GMHS Counselling service 2019

Our counselling service continues to work to improve the mental health and wellbeing of our community. The service is accessed by gay and bisexual men, MSM and the trans community and people who are questioning their sexual and/or gender identities. In 2019 62 individuals contacted our service requesting therapeutic support. They ranged in age from 19 to 65 years, the majority within the 30 to 40 age range.

Of the 62 people who accessed our service 74% were of Irish origin, with the remaining 26% being of South American, Asian, African and Western European origin. The majority of referrals came from GMHS Clinical services while a small number accessed the service as a result of word of mouth and from Outhouse community services. While clients presented with diverse issues common concerns included dealing with issues around coming out, concerns about dating or relationships, sexual issues, family problems, depression, self-esteem and confidence issues or dealing with an STI diagnoses, counselling can provide a reflective space which helps to provide emotional relief and understanding of one's life choices. Demand for the service is always high and is increasing significantly (from 44 people in 2018) as culturally competent services that specifically support the MSM population are not always easily accessible. Many clients specifically contact our service because it is offered within an LGBTQ affirmative and culturally sensitive context. Upon contacting the service an initial assessment is arranged before including the person in the waiting list which lasts an average of two months during the year. The counselling is provided by two psychotherapists who are accredited by The Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) and The Irish Council for Psychotherapy, and are supervised according to the standards of these two organisations.

Diagnosis at GMHS 2019

In 2019 there were 180 clinics at GMHS (49 weeks) and the demands on GMHS continued to increase with 11,652 men attending (1176 were first time attendees at GMHS). Due capacity issues GMHS was unable to cater for 1,700 people who tried to access its services.

- 856 Gonorrhoea infections – a 3 % increase on 2018 figures (20% were first time attendees to GMHS). 16% of patients were diagnosed with Gonorrhoea at 2 sites during 2019 while 2% were diagnosed with Gonorrhoea at 3 sites in that 12 month period.
- Where a single site of infection was identified 42% of GC infections were Rectal, 49% Pharyngeal, 9% Urethral.
- 16% of patients were treated for GC on two separate occasions during 2019 with 2% being treated on 3 separate occasions.
- 637 Chlamydia infections – an increase of 6% over 2018 (31% were first time attendees to GMHS). 12% of

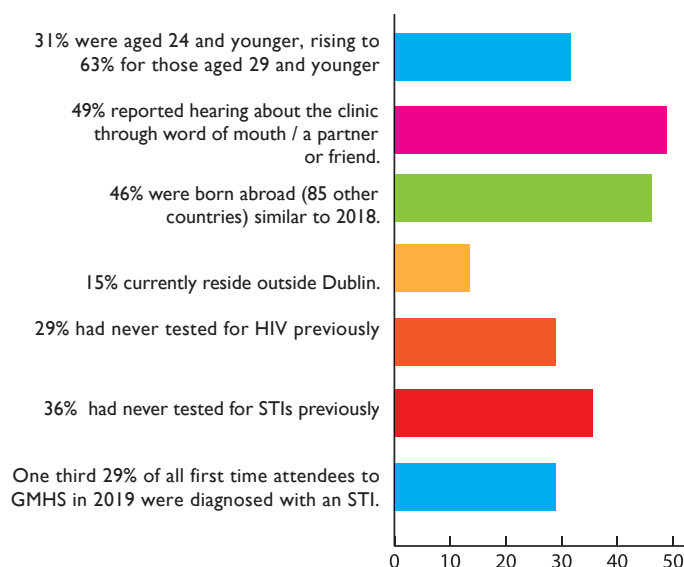
patients were diagnosed with Chlamydia at two sites in 2019 while 1% were diagnosed with Chlamydia at 3 sites in that 12 month period.

- Where single site of infection was identified 61% of CT Infections were Rectal, 29% Urethral and 10% Pharyngeal.
- 11% of patients were treated for CT on two separate occasions during 2019 with 1% being treated on 3 separate occasions and 1% being treated on 4 separate occasions during that 12 month period.
- 57 HIV infections were diagnosed during 2019, 27 of these were first time diagnosis and were previously unaware, while 53% (30/57) had tested positive elsewhere. All patients diagnosed with HIV were linked to local services within 1-2 weeks of diagnosis. 56% were first time patients to GMHS. Of note 33% of new infections had tested negative within the previous 3 months with a further 15% testing negative within the previous 6 months and 19% testing negative within the previous year. For 15% of new diagnosis this was their first ever HIV test.
- 246 diagnosis of Syphilis in 2019 indicating an increase of 46% on 2018 – 72% were diagnosed with early infectious syphilis and 14% were re-infections (65% were first time attendees to GMHS).
- Hepatitis C infections were also diagnosed

There were further cases of: HSV (genital herpes), LGV, Shigella and treatments for HPV (genital warts). In addition there were over 4,600 preventative vaccines administered in 2019 these included vaccines to prevent infections from Hepatitis A and B and HPV. There were 11,652 service users catered for in 2019 for a combination of assessments, screening, vaccinations and reviews.

Patient's first presentation to GMHS 2019

There were 1,176 patients whose first ever presentation to the GMHS screening service was in 2019: Of these:



HIV Prevention and Sexual Health Awareness 2019

As a HSE service, GMHS values the partnership with the Gay Health Network (GHN), and its members across Ireland including Outhouse (LGBT+ Community Centre Dublin), Gay Switchboard Ireland, HIV Ireland, Positive Now and BeLonG To Youth Service amongst others. Of enormous importance and benefit also are the partnerships with Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme and Health Protection Surveillance Centre. Including partnerships with the addiction services and Rialto community drugs team and Social Inclusion Services.

PEP at GMHS 2019

270 patients were prescribed Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) in 2019 similar to 2018 figures. 87 (32%) patients were first time attendees to the clinic. 35% were Irish, 10% reported sexual assault within the previous 72 hours as the reason for accessing PEP, all of these patients were counselled regarding assessment at a sexual assault treatment unit. 10% were between 48 and 72 hours from the exposure. 48% reported impaired judgement / being under the influence of drugs or alcohol at time of exposure. 47% were under the age of 30.

From Baggot Street Hospital to The Meath Primary Care Campus



2019 was a big year for GMHS as its services moved from Baggot Street Hospital to The Meath Primary Care Campus. Since GMHS opened its first clinic on 6th October 1992, trends in STI infections indicated that sexual health services would need further expansion to address this critical public health issue. As MSM community members are increasingly committed to minding their sexual health, the demand for its services has risen rapidly over the years. Of the 120,000 patient visits since its inception, over 40,000 of those have attended the service in the last four years alone. The need for newer, more suitable, facilities which would allow them to continue providing exceptional service became apparent.



As societal attitudes to LGBT+ people have evolved for the better since those early years, so too has the attitude of the community itself toward its own health. The GMHS lends itself to changing attitudes in sexual health by providing a brighter, more visible building adapted to the needs of services users.

“Sexual health is a really important part of our entire health, just as important as mental health and physical health”

Siobhan O’Dea, Manager GMHS

The engagement and involvement of services users in the GMHS has been critical to its ongoing success. The clinic has always been supported by the men using the service and by the greater LGBT community. Collaboration between service users, the multi-disciplinary team and HSE management has been fundamental to the success and improvement of the service.

Services schedule at GMHS

MON	No Syntoms Clinic - Full STI Screening - Rapid HIV Test	Tickets 1.15pm	Clinic Starts 1.30pm
TUES WED	Full Service Clinic - Full STI Screen - Vaccines & PEP - STI Treatment	Tickets 4pm	Clinic Starts 4pm - Nurse Services 6pm - Doctor Services
THUR	PrEP Monitoring Clinic & Prescriptions	Tickets 9.05am	Clinic Starts 9.30am



GMHS Clinic

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