

GMHS16

THE ANNUAL REPORT 2008 FOR THE GAY MEN'S HEALTH SERVICE HSE



This is the 16th year of operation for the Gay Men's Health Service (GMHS), HSE. Since the last report in 2006/2007, demands on our services remain as busy as ever. In 2008, over 5,200 men visited the clinic, of the 580 first-time attendees, 33% were aged under 24 and 36% were born in countries other than the island of Ireland. Of the 1,750 medical screenings, there were 6% STI diagnoses; from blood tests, 1.5% HIV and 3% syphilis diagnoses. Further reports providing an analysis of these and national figures are in preparation for service delivery planning.

Nationally, HIV diagnoses among men who have sex with men (MSM) continue at a high rate and of particular concern is the number of undiagnosed HIV infection. Research among gay and bisexual men in Ireland shows that one in two men have not tested for HIV. The NASC HIV Education and Prevention Plan, 2008-2012, calls for increased access to HIV testing. Also worrying is the significant national increase in syphilis among MSM (www.hpsc.ie), and with the high rate of infection among first timers (5%) at GMHS, this highlights the need for increased access for the syphilis blood test. Towards the end of 2008, special meetings of stakeholders were established and the process began for a new syphilis awareness campaign.

The role and task of GMHS in relation to HIV and sexual health education and prevention is vital and this was recognised by Minister Mary Wallace, TD, when launching the 6th All-Ireland Gay Health Forum (GHF6) at Dublin Castle in June, 2008. At Outhouse, the counselling service was reorganised and the waiting list was reduced. The 33rd PDC course took place with two new facilitators. Our community HIV prevention and sexual health awareness programme continued apace in partnership with Johnny (Gay Peer Action) for the distribution of information and safer sex packs on the gay scene and with Gay Health Network (GHN) for the Rubber Up Campaign and production of the On the One Road Newsletter; to name but a few. GMHS was very involved in drawing up the GHN Strategic Plan 2008-2011. Other involvement includes representing the GMHS at the Sex Workers Alliance Ireland, The Stamp Out Stigma Campaign and with networks and groups in Europe and Britain. In 2008, GMHS continued to provide some support funding to LGBT pride events around Ireland.

GMHS is involved in many reports and organises the Real Lives internet surveys in conjunction with The Rainbow Project and Sigma Research. A highlight of 2008 was the launch of the The NASC HIV and AIDS Education and Prevention Plan 2008-2012. This and other reports: LGBT Health by the HSE, the Real Lives 2 (the All-Ireland gay sex survey 2005 and 2006), provide a framework for service planning. The Supporting LGBT Lives by the National Office for Suicide Prevention HSE, Belong To Youth Service and GLEN are also important, particularly in relation to development of mental health and primary care services and to create an understanding of the effects of Homophobia and Heterosexism on the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Sadly, in 2008, our friend and colleague Noel Walsh (RIP) died. Noel was a champion for GMHS and promoted its work in his articles in

GCN and at conferences around the world. As a HIV-positive man, he was acutely aware of stigma and discrimination issues but also saw the importance of networking and partnership and with the Gay Health Network, he was a leader in initiatives in Ireland. It is with pride that we dedicate this report and the 7th All Ireland Gay Health Forum 2009 to his memory.

Finally, I wish to thank David Walsh, Local Health Manager and Mary Kenny, General Manager HSE for their support and the appreciation expressed about the GMHS team. I particularly want to mention the GMHS Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) past and present, especially the assistants, security and clerical (administration) staff, without whom GMHS could not operate. I am sure I speak on behalf of the MDT of our continued commitment, motivation and determination to maintain a comprehensive, professional and friendly sexual health service.

SERVICE PLAN 2009

Though there are restrictions and difficulties in health provision, GMHS works to consolidate and serve according to its purpose and plan, operating in an innovative and flexible manner with our partners. Some of the key points for 2009 are as follows:

- Maintain service at the clinics and provide outreach and counselling at Outhouse LGBT centre;
- Continue in support and partnership with GHN, Johnny (peer action group), Belong To Youth Service, Outhouse and others. Continue the contribution towards LGBT Pride events around Ireland;
- Publish the Real Lives 2 Research Report for 2005 and 2006 and Real Lives 3 report for 2007 and 2008. Produce a Men From Afar 3 report;
- Maintain flexibility for production of relevant materials for promotion of sexual health and HIV awareness among MSM in Ireland;
- Organise the 7th All Ireland Gay Health Forum.

GMHS SERVICES 2008

Details of the GMHS clinical and other services can be seen at www.gaymenshealthservice.ie

GMHS CLINIC

There were 580 first-time clients in 2008, bringing the number of men registered since January 1997 to 6,620. The MDT team continues to provide a friendly, confidential and professional service. There is a ceiling of 36 places for full STI screening on Wednesdays and there are no STI screenings on Tuesdays. Triage at first point of contact means that men with symptoms are seen. The services are provided in a holistic manner with pre-HIV test counselling or discussion made available to all. All first-time clients receive pre-HIV test counselling. Pre-HIV test discussion is provided to all returns for HIV tests and is carried out by nurses, a health advisor and outreach worker.

2008 REPORT IN NUMBERS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 100 Clinics (50 Tue and 50 Wed) | 2,796 nursing contacts |
| 580 first time clients +8% over 2007 | 1,732 syphilis tests + 13% |
| 5,285 client visits +21% | 1,556 HIV tests |
| 2,931 appointments +19% | 891 Hepatitis B tests |
| 2,354 walk-ins +16% | 768 test on completion of Hep course |
| 1,870 triage sessions | 650 pre-HIV test discussion sessions |
| 1,750 medical STI screens | 890 pre-HIV test counselling sessions |

AGE PROFILE

A third of the men attending for the first time in 2008 were aged 24 years and younger. This rose to 62% (59% in 2007) for those aged 29 and younger.

| AGE RANGE | <20 | 20-24 | 25-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60> |
|---------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| 2008 N=580 | 3% | 30% | 29% | 26% | 9% | 2% | 1% |
| 2007 N=536 | 4% | 24% | 31% | 25% | 10% | 5% | 1% |

PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Most of the first-time attendees, 449 (77%), lived in Dublin City (all postal areas) and 44 (8%) in Dublin County. A significant number, 87 (15%), travelled from other parts of Ireland.

ETHNIC AND CULTURAL PROFILES

210 men (36%) were born outside the Island of Ireland (representing 46 countries) and 98% of these lived in Dublin City and County (Men from Afar 3 forthcoming).

| WHERE BORN | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Island of Ireland | 76% | 74% | 69% | 63% | 64% |
| Abroad | 24% | 26% | 31% | 37% | 36% |

DIAGNOSES AT THE CLINIC

Of the 1,750 screenings, 6% were diagnosed with an STI other than HIV or syphilis, with chlamydia (urethral) positive being the commonest. Significantly, a chlamydia (rectal) four-week pilot study showed an 8% positive rate, indicating there could be a higher number in a full year. There were 22 HIV positive diagnoses (1.5% of all HIV tests) and 52 men treated for syphilis (3% of all syphilis tests). Significantly, the rate for first timers was 2% for HIV and 5% for syphilis with 3% for chlamydia (urethral) while other STIs were much lower. GMHS continues to diagnose a significant number of both national HIV and syphilis figures for MSM reported to HPSC. Further reports are available from GMHS.

OUTREACH

There is one outreach worker / trainer based in Outhouse and they continue to be busy with individual client contacts, interventions, publications, distribution of safer sex packs, and dealing with the increased demand for training. Workshops such as "summer loving" on various topics for gay and bisexual men and the popular Personal Development Courses. Outreach is also engaged in partnership work with Gay Health Network (GHN), BelonG2 (LGBT Youth Service) and Outhouse (LGBT Community Centre). Outreach is heavily involved in joint work with Johnny (gay peer action) distributing "Rubber Up" packs and information to gay commercial venues.

COUNSELLING

Counseling at the GMHS clinic and at Outhouse is especially important for therapeutic interventions regarding risk taking. It is also important for support for men diagnosed with HIV and reducing the chance of onward infection. The counsellor service based in Outhouse is always in great demand. In 2008, a new method for provision of this service was introduced, offering up to 20 client sessions per week. Already, early indications show that uptake is high with 22 individuals seen at the time of this report publication.

MANAGEMENT

The work of the manager reflects the business of the service and the other demands in supervision, co-ordination, promotion, research, training, publications and partnership work. The Manager is involved in networks such as those mentioned above and both national and regional steering committees such as the National AIDS Strategy Committee, and others. The goal for 2009 and beyond is to continue managing GMHS to deliver a quality and effective service, making it more accessible and relevant to men who have sex with men.

GAY MEN'S HEALTH SERVICE CLINIC

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