

# Taking Responsibility by Informing Men

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## Abstract

Operation TRIM was designed as a way for local public health workers to educate, empower, and collaborate with barber shops and beauty salons within the North Central Health District counties to provide free STD prevention literature and prophylactics to their customers. The goal of Operation TRIM was to carry out a pilot implementation, assess the implementation, and develop an evaluation plan. Barbershops and beauty salons have proven to be culturally appropriate health education venues, and in many communities, these businesses are akin to your local sports broker, pastor, counselor, big brother, politician, obnoxious uncle, teacher, and arbitrator. It is not uncommon for barber shop patrons to spend hours waiting for goods and services or just being present for entertainment value. This time places a golden opportunity at the feet of public health workers to impact change in community health through Operation TRIM.

This pilot study focused on efforts in Putnam County, Georgia, in collaboration with the Georgia Department of Public Health, North Central Health District Communicable Disease Unit. Collaborative opportunities were sought, two-way education fostered, and increased utilization of local health department STD services was noted in the short-term.

## Introduction

The North Central Health District is comprised of 13 Counties located in middle Georgia. These counties are Baldwin, Bibb, Crawford, Hancock, Houston, Jasper, Monroe, Peach, Putnam, Twiggs, Washington, and Wilkinson Counties. According to the United States Census Bureau the North Central Health District accounts for approximately 520,905 people. The goal of the North Central Health District is optimal health for all Georgians while striving to prevent disease, promote health, and protect communities against health threats.

According to Oasis the State of Georgia had 66,209 cases of STDs reported in 2012, the North Central Health District had 4612 total STD cases in 2012. According to Oasis Putnam County had 124 reported cases of STDs in 2012. The Putnam County health department responds by treating infected people, providing prophylactics, education, and monitoring.

Certain social determinants of health constructs (poverty to median income) are closely related and closely associated with high STD rates. Counties in Georgia with high poverty rates and low percentage of white collar workers have greater need for STD prevention services.

The Center for Disease Control recommends structural level condom distribution interventions combined with individual or group activities for increasing condom use to reduce the transmission of STDs. Interventions that combined condom distribution programs with additional individual, group, or community-level activities showed the greatest efficacy. One possible reason for this is that these different modalities address different behavioral determinants as well as other prevention needs of individuals in affected communities.

Operation TRIM addresses both condom accessibility, individual and group activities by providing barbers with necessary resources. Although TRIM has never been tried in the North Central Health District, New York City has a similar program in place. New York City distributes free condoms and water-based lubricants to partnering organizations through their web site [www.nycccondom.org](http://www.nycccondom.org). Partners include traditional public health agencies (e.g. clinics, hospitals, shelters), schools, and businesses (e.g. health clubs, bars, barbershops, clothing stores, hotels). Distribution grew from 5.8 million free condoms in 2004 to 17.3 million in 2006 to over 41.5 million in 2009.

## Methods

Barbershops and hair salons were identified in Putnam County by NCHD Communicable Disease Coordinator and the student researcher.

Barbershops were contacted through the mail and over the telephone to gauge interest. For those contacted the student researcher attempted to provide information to Barbershop owners, on how STDs impact the community and requested an opportunity have them collaborate with TRIM.

NCHD Communicable Disease Coordinator and the student researcher took to the streets of Putnam County to engage the community in an effort to establish relationships with Putnam County Barbershops.

Implementation begin to take form after direct interaction was made at Jones Master Cuts. The barbershop owner Grady Jones was mentioned by the Putnam County Health Department to be a cornerstone in the African American Community of Putnam County.

The student researcher attempted to have a formal agreement with Jones Master Cuts and the North Central Health District.

The student researcher focused on evaluation design by providing a pre and post test to barbershop owner to ask patrons to complete.

The student researcher prepared twenty five complete contraceptive kits for Jones Master Cuts. Each contraceptive kit included ten quality condoms, two female condoms, two forms of literature, instructions on how to properly use a contraceptive device (both male and female), two rubber dams and STD Awareness paraphernalia.

The student researcher followed up with the shop owner on a weekly basis to obtain feedback from the barbershop and patrons

Developed provisions for the shop owner to communicate directly with Putnam County Health Department essential personnel beyond completion of the student researchers project.

Continue to encourage other local businesses to become a part of TRIM.

## Results

Out of the 10 local listed barbershops in Putnam County zero were initially open to TRIM.

"Wootens Barbershop," explained that due to the age of the patrons that frequented their establishment that they had absolutely no interest.

Jones Master Cuts agreed to partner with the NCHD and the student researcher to launch TRIM in Putnam County.

The people of Putnam County begin to come in to the Putnam County Health Department for testing and diagnosis after information was beginning to spread throughout the community.

The student researcher and Jones Master Cuts were in constant contact on supply levels and the likes and dislikes of patrons. Twenty-five new kits were delivered bi-weekly Jones Master Cuts.

## STDs

| NCHD       | Cases | STD Rate |
|------------|-------|----------|
| District   | 4,612 | 874.9    |
| Baldwin    | 272   | 586.6    |
| Bibb       | 2,242 | 1432.9   |
| Crawford   | 40    | 317.5    |
| Hancock    | 73    | 811.5    |
| Houston    | 988   | 676.1    |
| Jasper     | 60    | 440.2    |
| Jones      | 60    | 210.0    |
| Monroe     | 103   | 386.7    |
| Peach      | 344   | 1245.4   |
| Putnam     | 124   | 585.0    |
| Twiggs     | 50    | 591.9    |
| Washington | 187   | 895.6    |
| Wilkinson  | 69    | 720.5    |

- The highest rates of Chlamydia in Putnam County are among 18-24 year olds
- In Putnam County of the known Chlamydia cases where race was identified the highest prevalence was amongst the Hispanic population.
- The highest rates of Gonorrhoea in Putnam County are among 18-24 years old
- In Putnam County, of known Gonorrhoea cases where race was identified, African American was the highest
- Putnam County ranked 72<sup>nd</sup> highest out of 159 counties for Gonorrhoea
- From 2006 – 2010, only 47% of adults in the NCHD reported ever being tested for HIV, which was a 12% decrease from 2000-2004 (55%)
- According to the High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2011 (covering grades 9-12), only 12.4% of students report that they were never taught in school about HIV/AIDS

## Recommendations

The process of preventing STDs must be a collaborative one. No one agency, organization, or sector can effectively address STD prevention without community engagement, which includes non-traditional partners.

Public health, should reconsider and broaden their potential stakeholders and partners for prevention efforts. Further engage community based businesses for participation.

Local health departments need to investigate, understand, and utilize technology as a means to communicate health prevention information. Today's youth use social media and phone applications (apps) as a primary mechanism to communicate and transfer information.

To address the incidence and prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases in Putnam County, Georgia, public health may need to refocus their prevention effort strategy, modify how services are delivered, and accept new responsibilities.

The student researcher recommends initial implementation of a project such as Operation TRIM should be made by people from outside the County, for it decreased the perception of bias among local citizens due to their longstanding relationship with the current Communicable Disease Unit staff.

## References

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources County Comparison Tool. <http://www.census.gov/did/www/sahie>
- Georgia Department of Public Health, Office of Health Indicators for Planning (OHIP), Online Analytical Statistical Information System (OASIS). Retrieved from <http://oasis.state.ga.us/>

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