BASHH MEDIA STATEMENT

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BASHH urge doctors to ‘make every contact count’ in promoting safer sex

Following the Government’s call at the start of this year for doctors to pledge to ‘make every contact count’ in the NHS, the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH), in partnership with the British HIV Association (BHIVA), have published new evidence-based guidelines on how clinicians working in sexual health and primary care can promote and advise patients on safer sex.\textsuperscript{[1]}

Against a backdrop of rising rates of sexually transmitted infection in the UK, BASHH has produced the UK National Guidelines on Safer Sex Advice to guide and promote the delivery of brief behaviour change interventions in GUM clinics, general practice, and other sexual health settings. The guidelines make important recommendations on the content of advice including: condom use and effectiveness; oral sex and other sexual practices; and advice for people living with HIV, or who have sexual partners who are living with HIV.

The guidelines have been developed from a major review of the evidence-base and outline the positive benefits of behaviour change interventions, which include a reduction of STIs, increased condom use and a reduction in the number of sexual partners. The evidence suggests that as little as two intervention sessions are enough to reduce the risk of acquiring STIs in the future. It is suggested that clinics work towards creating a cultural change in

services, whereby all staff are trained to incorporate behaviour change interventions in their routine practice.

The guidelines suggest that 100% condom use remains the desired goal, but recognise that in real life this is not possible for everyone all of the time and that a pragmatic approach that includes other ways of reducing risk will also be needed. They recommend a range of innovative behaviour change techniques that can be delivered by clinic staff, including the possibility of using computer assisted interventions and supplemented by videos in waiting rooms. The guidelines include a series of evidence based advice statements from which a patient advice leaflet has been developed.[2]

Dr Janet Wilson, President of the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV commented:

"Prevention of STIs including HIV is a fundamental part of our role as clinicians working in sexual health. One of the best ways to control the spread of STIs is to treat people with them as early as possible.

Working with people who attend sexual health clinics with an STI, or with concerns about STIs, to build on the knowledge, motivation and skills they already possess can help us to achieve this. Providing clear, unambiguous, evidence based safer sex advice and using proven brief behaviour change intervention techniques can reduce their risks of contracting and transmitting STIs.

These evidence-based National Guidelines on safer sex provide important recommendations of how everyone working in sexual health can make every contact count by promoting good sexual health and enabling people to make informed and safe choices about their sexual activity."

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Notes to editors

1. The UK national guideline on Safer Sex Advice 2012 can be downloaded here. The accompanying review of evidence is available here, and the Safer sex patient information leaflet here. For a copy of any of these documents please email neil.balmer@munroforster.com.

2. BASHH is the lead professional representative body for those managing STIs and HIV in the UK. It seeks to innovate and deliver excellent tailored education and training to healthcare professionals, trainers and trainees in the UK and to determine, monitor and maintain standards of governance in the provision of sexual health and HIV care.

3. The British HIV association is the leading UK professional association representing professionals in HIV care. It acts as a national advisory body to professions and other organisations advising on all aspects of HIV care. Please click to download the UK national guidelines for HIV testing 2008 from the BHIVA website www.bhiva.org

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