HIV testing in abortion services

We read with interest the commentary by Sylvia Bates and the article by Briggs et al. regarding HIV testing in abortion services in the October 2011 issue of this Journal. In particular we note the statement about the lack of data in this area. We have recently conducted an audit of this topic in our integrated sexual health service.

A total of 150 case notes of patients attending for pregnancy counselling prior to potential referral for a termination of pregnancy were analysed. Analysis was related to the offer of an HIV test, acceptance of the test and the reasons for declining the test. Overall 102/150 (68%) were offered the test and 21/102 (21%) accepted testing. Of the 81/102 who declined testing, 33 had recorded reasons in their notes for declining the test. Eight of these 33 patients stated that they had had the test elsewhere, in 6/33 cases patients stated they preferred testing at the end of the incubation period and in 11/33 cases patients stated they were tested as part of a recent antenatal screen.
The offer of HIV testing and uptake fall short of British HIV Association standards. As a result of this audit standards have been reiterated to staff. The offer of testing can be drilled down to individual clinicians; this can be monitored on an ongoing basis. Also offering the test on an opt-out basis is being considered. We plan to re-audit the topic in the near future.

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References