

Am I Really Blue?



A Case Study in Assessment and Assurance

Mid-America Regional Public Health Institute Year 13 Fellows

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Introduction:

Where: Blueburg, population 57,000, is a small affluent suburb outside of the large metropolitan city of Indigo, Illinois – population 2.8 million. Blueburg and Indigo are both within Cobalt County.

When: Present day, 2004. Case study begins in June and runs through to September.

What: In reviewing data from the quarterly performance reports, Susan Stateslackey, in the Division of HIV/AIDS at the State Health Department, notices an increase in the incidence of HIV positive Hispanic persons in Cobalt County. She contacts Constance SurVeillance, the Communicable Disease Coordinator for Cobalt County Health Department (CCHD) to make sure she is aware of the increase.

A rising proportion of the HIV/AIDS cases among men who have sex with men (MSM) can be accounted for by the African-American and Hispanic populations. From 1996 to 1998, there was an overall decline in AIDS cases and deaths among MSM but the decline among African-Americans and Hispanics was smaller than that seen in Asians, Native Americans, and non-Hispanic whites. Cases of AIDS diagnosed in the United States in 2002 indicated 39% of the Hispanic cases to be male-male sexual contact, and 27% were through heterosexual contact.¹

Case Body:

Maria woke at one in the morning, her body drenched in sweat. Getting out of bed quietly so as to not disturb her husband, Carlos, she stepped into the bathroom and splashed cold water on her face and neck. While drying herself off, Maria sat down on the edge of the tub.

This is the fifth time in two weeks. Why am I sweating so much? It can't be the change – I'm too young, and my TB test came back negative, thought the 33 year old mother of two. I've lost weight so I know I'm not pregnant again. Perhaps I should talk to Conchita today at our meeting.

Slipping back into bed beside her husband of 13 years, Maria shifted to a comfortable position and slowly drifted back to sleep.

Later that morning, after seeing the kids off to school and kissing Carlos goodbye before he left for work, Maria called Conchita to see if they could ride together to the Hispanic Women's Coalition. Perhaps she could talk to her before they got to the church.

¹ Fact Sheet – HIV/AIDS among Hispanics in the United States – CDC-NCHSTP-Divisions of HIV/AIDS. Risk Factors and Barriers to Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/hispanic.htm>

“Chita? It’s Maria,” she said when the other woman answered the phone. “Can we ride together today?”

“Of course,” the older woman replied. “Is there something on your mind?”

On the way to the meeting, Maria explained to Conchita that she hadn’t been feeling well lately and about the night sweats and weight loss. Conchita advised that it sounded like she needed to see her doctor.

After welcoming everyone, Mrs. Hernandez introduced the speaker for the meeting – Constance SurVeillance.

“Ms. SurVeillance is from the Cobalt County Health Department. She has a very timely and important message for us. After all, most of us have young children and we need to educate them about the risks of sex.”

Connie Surveillance introduced herself as the Communicable Disease Coordinator for the Health Department and began her presentation on the risk of HIV/AIDS in the Community. As she spoke, Maria began to worry.

Carlos Sanchez arrived at work after his commute from Blueburg into downtown Indigo. The Metra had been overly crowded and he’d been forced to share a seat with a stranger. Since he’d had to share a seat he would have preferred the twenty-something young man two seats up. Carlos smiled – *but my life isn’t that stressful these days, I don’t need anything special.*

Walking into the office Carlos was met by Harold Redmon.

“Hey, Carlos, did you hear about Henry Calientas?”

“No, what about Henry?” he asked.

“He’s *sick*, if you know what I mean,” Harold replied with a raise of his eyebrows. “He’s got AIDS.” Seeing the other man’s confusion, Harold continued, “Well, with his life style what did he expect? The guy was swinging both ways, you know. I can’t imagine how Shelly is taking this – or if he’s even told her! Who knows... maybe she was swinging with him.”

“Mr. Redmon, line 2,” came over the intercom.

“Well, gotta get busy – let me know if you want to do lunch later,” Harold said. Apparently forgetting for the moment the news he’d shared, he walked away.

Carlos set his coffee cup down and stared at it, thinking about his colleague Henry.

Three short weeks later Carlos couldn’t believe he was standing at the graveside watching them lower Henry Calientas’ coffin to its final resting place. He looked across at Henry’s wife, Shelly. As he understood it, Shelly had been shocked. There had even been talk that she wouldn’t be at the funeral after having found out Henry had been meeting up with young men from time to time. Harold had told him Henry had been playing soccer with a younger crowd through the park district for the last few years. *Thank goodness I never saw him – we must have been in different leagues,* Carlos thought.

Glancing around at the crowd that had shown up for the funeral, Carlos was startled to recognize a face that wasn't from the office. He had a strong sense of familiarity. Suddenly he realized that the face he was staring at was the same face he had fantasized about on the train the day he had heard about Henry having AIDS. *Was he in Henry's soccer league or was he one of Henry's one-night-stands?* Carlos felt himself pale as he realized how close he had come to approaching the man.

"Carlos?" Maria prompted.

"What? I'm sorry sweetheart, I didn't hear you," Carlos replied to his wife.

"They've called my name. It's time to go see the doctor," Maria said getting up out of her seat. She fiddled with her purse, nervous about the blood test results. Her doctor had called her personally and asked her to come in to discuss the results and she'd asked her to make sure her husband came along.

Perhaps I have some terrible illness. What will Carlos do? How will he be able to handle the children? What if I die? Maria's thoughts trailed off as they were shown into the exam room.

Carlos and Maria sat in stunned silence. Dr. Martinez sat back in her chair and gave them time to absorb what she'd said. She knew that both of them had not expected the news that Maria's test results had come back positive for HIV.

After a few more moments of silence, Dr. Martinez cleared her throat. "Carlos? You will need to be tested."

Carlos stared at her uncomprehendingly.

"How could this happen?" Maria whispered, her eyes full of tears. "I've never ... I mean, Carlos is the only one I ever..." her voice trailed off as she looked at her husband.

While Carlos and Maria struggled with the death of Carlos' co-worker and Maria's diagnosis, Constance SurVeillance was struggling with her own dilemma. Ever since her brief presentation to the Hispanic Women's Coalition, she had been trying to figure out how to develop educational material about HIV/AIDS that would reach both the male and female Hispanic population. She had spoken with Susan Stateslackey about the data coming in and knew she had to figure out how to address the situation. *These two groups are going to have different barriers, so I'm going to have to deal with two different sets of issues.* A logical place to start, she realized, was listing the barriers and figuring out how each side would view them. *But this isn't something I can – or should – do on my own. I need to bring in some of my public health partners.*

She decided to call Nancy Lottodata in the Women's Health Initiative Division, for help, thinking they could bounce questions off one another.

"Nancy, this is Connie," she began, "do you have some time to come over to my office and help me with a project I'm working on?"

"Sure, what are you working on?" Nancy replied.

"I want to develop some educational material to present to our Hispanic population. I'm trying to increase their awareness on the risks they face for HIV/AIDS," Connie told her.

"Sounds interesting. Mind if I bring Alfred?" Nancy asked.

“Al Fraid? He’s a Health Educator isn’t he? Sure.” Connie responded.

“Well, what level of awareness do you have in this population?” Al asked when they had all gotten settled around the conference table in Connie’s office.

“We’re really not sure, Al” Connie answered him. “What I’m trying to do today is come up with a program to present to the Cobalt County Hispanic Women’s Coalition and the Blueberg park district’s Men’s Hispanic Soccer Leagues. I was thinking that if we talked about what types of issues I need to deal with, then I could create a presentation around those.”

“Why did you choose those two groups?” Al asked.

“Well, I chose them because they are two very large community organizations that serve our Hispanic population. The soccer league is where we can reach a majority of the Hispanic men outside of church, and Mrs. Hernandez with the Coalition has been asking us to provide programs for them for some time now –this is a great opportunity. I’ve spoken with the Women’s Coalition once already but I know they are interested in hearing more,” Connie replied.

“So – why haven’t we been able to communicate our message?” Nancy asked.

“That’s what we’re here to try to figure out,” Connie said. “I know that religion is an important part of this community’s culture; it may present some challenges in spreading the message- after all the catholic groups may lobby for abstinence-based messages or at the very least they may want to ensure we aren’t saying anything about contraception. What types of questions could be asked to help them understand how this part of their life might influence their perception of whether or not they are at risk? I want to come up with questions that will get the message across and not alienate them.”

“Okay – could we address questions like how big a role does the church play in your day-to-day life? Or how do you handle birth control?” Nancy responded.

“That sounds great,” Al said. “But I’m a little concerned about just developing two programs to address two specific groups. What do you think of the idea of putting together a town hall style meeting – maybe in conjunction with the *Summer’s End Festival* in August? We could make it a community meeting to talk about all types of issues – not just HIV/AIDS – but everything from a safe place for kids to play and literacy, to a variety of health topics.”

“I like that idea,” Connie replied. “Who else should we involve? We need to include more than just the three of us if we’re going to develop a town hall meeting.”

The three of them then listed out the other people they felt should be included in planning the town hall meeting, as well as some barriers and issues they thought they might face specific to HIV/AIDS.

Stakeholders to include
Representative from the Hispanic Women’s Coalition
Health Occupation Nurse from Central Distribution (<i>the largest employer in Blueburg</i>)
Park District and Soccer League representatives
Representative from School District
Police Chief and Fire Chief
Hospital Medical Director

Blueburg Clinic representative
Representatives from area churches
Community Groups such as ALMA (Association of Latino Men for Action), PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), Junior League, CWA (Concerned Women for America), and LWV (League of Women Voters)

Barriers, Issues for Topics to be Address at the Town Hall Meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious issues; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expectation of Monogamy ○ Non-use of condoms ○ Same sex attraction – sexual contact is forbidden by the church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Machismo ○ Level of literacy – in both English and Spanish ○ Gender roles (Man = head of household, decision makers, Woman = motherhood, stay home and care for children) ○ Social interactions – where do the men hang out? what activities are the women involved in?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Poverty level ○ Employment – type, place, consistency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heterosexual Risk • Perceived Sexual Orientation – self identification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance Abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alcohol ○ Intravenous drug use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places for children to play safely

Connie then told Al and Nancy about information she had received after talking with her Administrator, Navi Blue. Navi had given Connie information on the Health Belief Model. “She thought I might find this useful,” Connie said, handing them a copy of *Developing Effective Behavior Change Interventions*.²

Health Belief Model: *"Two major factors influence the likelihood that a person will adopt a recommended preventive health action: First, they must feel personally threatened by the disease, i.e. they must feel personally susceptible to a disease with serious or severe consequences; Second, they must believe that the benefits of taking the preventive action outweigh the perceived barriers to (and/or costs of) preventive action."*

Navi had also recommended she include the following Healthy People 2010 Objectives in her material:

- 13-2: Reduce the number of new AIDS cases among adolescents and adult men who have sex with men, and
- 13-6: Increase the proportion of sexually active persons who use condoms.

The three of them looked at the HP2010 data and found that according to Objective 13-2, challenges to HIV prevention programs for MSM include (1) reaching MSM who may not identify themselves as

² Fishbein summarizing Becker [1974, 1984], Janz and Becker [1984], Rosenstock, Strecher and Becker [1994] page 3 in *Developing Effective Behavior Change Interventions*, Fishbein M, Univ. of Illinois.

homosexual or bisexual, (2) representing MSM from certain racial and ethnic groups in HIV prevention planning, (3) increasing knowledge about HIV risk, and (4) improving access to HIV testing and health care. The targets set for Objective 13-2 were developed using a 25% improvement scale with a goal of only having 13,385 new cases. The baseline used was 17,847 cases in 1998 (among males 13 years and older). The HP2010 material clearly indicated that the baseline was developed using estimated data. Next, they looked at Objective 13-6. In doing so they learned that for 13-6, knowledge of effective negotiating skills is another critical element of increased condom use and that the targets were still in development.³

Connie worked diligently for the next two weeks putting together information and contacting people to invite their participation in the planning of the town hall meeting to be held in conjunction with Blueberg's *Summer's End Festival* scheduled for the end of August. At the end of July, the group held a retreat to finalize the plans. During the meeting, Janis Repartee, a reporter for the Blueberg Daily who had attended Connie's earlier presentation to the Women's Coalition, mentioned that her editor had suggested inviting Wiley "Popper" Pontiac, a local author and former-president of ALMA who lives in Indigo, to attend the town hall meeting. She explained that his book, *Am I Really Blue?*, had recently been released and he was scheduled to attend the Festival for a book signing. The book, similar in content and style to J.L. King's book, *On the Down Low*, dealt with the "Down Low" phenomenon from the perspective of the Hispanic population. Al Fraid spoke up, "I think it would be great to invite him, but I think we should just invite him as an attendee. I think if we advertise too much of the HIV/AIDS focus we may not get as many people attending the town hall meeting as we want. Maybe once we form some separate task force groups to look into the different topics we're addressing, he could be more involved in the HIV/AIDS group."

The day dawned bright and clear, with no threat of rain to dampen the Summer's End Festival. People milled about the park and soccer field enjoying the various displays and games. At 12:30PM, everyone began to gather at the pavilion for the town hall meeting. The cool building gave the promise of some respite from the August afternoon heat. One after another the presenters Connie and her team had lined up for the event began presenting their material.

Following Dr. Patience Kincaid's talk on women's health and Fire Chief Charcola's presentation on smoke detectors, Al Fraid stood on the stage and began his discussion on the need for the development of a community task force or two to deal with the growing concern of sexually active teens and the risks of HIV/AIDS. Al began by presenting ideas on how to talk to kids about sex and condom use. When he started talking in general about the HIV/AIDS issues, a loud voice in the middle of the room cut him off.

"I hardly think this is the time or place to discuss such issues," declared Alex Santiago. "In fact this should be no concern of ours whatsoever. This belongs at home and in the church – we know the teachings and we don't need some fancy task force to tell us what to do. Besides, this isn't something our community needs to worry about – we don't have any of those people around here."

Several voices echoed Alex's comments and Connie SurVeillance, standing next to the make-shift stage, worried that the town hall meeting would end badly. She watched as Al stood quietly for a moment before addressing Mr. Santiago's directly.

"Mr. Santiago, I appreciate your comments and would like to ask you to join me in heading up a small committee that will provide us at the County Health Department with your ideas and input on this matter. We need people in our community such as you to help us understand the health needs of the community – and if HIV/AIDS turns out to not be one of those needs, well, that would be great. Would you be willing to help us address this, Mr. Santiago?" Al asked.

The man blustered a little then replied, "Of course I would Mr. Fraid – it shouldn't be too difficult since we don't really have a problem."

Connie smiled, pleased that Al had calmed down the man and enlisted his help all at the same time.

³ <http://www.healthypeople.gov/document/Word/Volume1/13HIV.doc>

Some of the Task Force Groups established at the town hall meeting:

Task Force	Purpose/Focus:
Playing it Safe Kids	Looking at the opportunity to re-furbish or develop safe play grounds or indoor facilities for neighborhood kids. One of the goals is to get them off the streets and out from in front of the video games.
The Teen Connection	Develop programs and presentations; counseling groups and support groups for teens who are sexually active or considering taking this step in their lives.
HIV/AIDS – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What Women Need to Know</i> – The Hispanic Women’s Coalition will spearhead this one. • <i>I’m Not at Risk – or Am I?</i> – Al Fraid offered to facilitate this group and do train-the-trainer workshops 	Both groups will focus on developing interventions and educational programs for their target audience. Stakeholders involved will include Occupational Health Nurses, Representatives of CCHD, Community Health Workers, Physicians from the local clinic and hospital, and men and women within the community.

Because of Maria’s diagnosis, Carlos had agreed to join the “*I’m Not at Risk – or Am I?*” Task Force. They have had one meeting already and had developed ideas about possible interventions.

Intervention	Where	What
Posters on HIV Risks	Parks, restrooms, bookstores (regular and adult), bars, rest areas, prisons, jails	Informational posters that include information such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • list of risks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ behaviors (i.e oral sex, married men having sex with men, anal sex, multiple partners) • phone numbers to call • testing site locations
Offering testing at sites other than the local health department	Local Jail Local businesses – such as Central Distribution YMCA	Free confidential testing on-site at their place of employment
Catching the attention of everyday people and everyday scenarios	EVERY WHERE – Parks, restrooms, bookstores (regular and adult,) bars, billboards – On the posters as well as ads in paper	Developed a slogan and designed posters to put up: “The new face of AIDS” (translated into Spanish too) on a mirrored poster with the catch phrase “What risks are you taking?” One side of the poster lists behaviors and the other has a bulleted list describing five or six vignettes that describe someone, their life and behaviors. Ex.: High profile attorney, Mr. Jones is 42 years old, has been married for ten years, has two kids, and enjoys one-night stands with anonymous men.
Train-the-Trainer Workshops	Community settings	Targeted to men’s groups – to train people how to educate, talk to, and/or make others aware of the risks.
Work with Men’s groups to establish a support group	Local location in Blueburg	“Therapy-type” setting that provides men with a ‘safe place’ to discuss their own issues. <i>Do I stay with my wife? Am I really blue? I’ve never considered myself to be a homosexual? Can straight guys have sex with other men and still be straight?</i>

mechanism		<i>Does my sexual behavior have anything to do with my sexual orientation?</i>
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Closing

Four weeks after the town hall meeting and the *Summer’s End Festival*, Carlos Sanchez sat in his parked car at the edge of the soccer field’s lot. He watched as a few people made their way to the pavilion for the “*I’m not at Risk – or Am I?*” Task force meeting. He and Maria had attended the town hall meeting and both joined a couple of the task force groups set up that day. Maria was working on the task force looking at ways to create safe places for the children to play in the neighborhood and with the Women’s Coalition sub-group looking at teen counseling for sexually active teens. The information provided at the town hall meeting had shown that there was a need for more education on the dangers of unprotected sex.

There had been some controversy over the messages both groups wanted to get out – safe sex is critical to your health. Several businesses had declined putting up any posters that mentioned oral and anal sex, let alone homosexuality. They hadn’t wanted to be seen as condoning public images dealing with such issues.

The agenda for that afternoon’s meeting, he knew, was to talk about setting up a wide variety of testing for things such as blood pressure, cholesterol, HIV/STD, and BMI at the soccer field on game weekends and for the task force members to report on progress at getting their employers to agree to on-site testing of the same sort. His own boss had been pretty open to the idea, especially after Henry’s death.

As he climbed out of the car, he saw “Popper” Pontiac walking across the grass toward the pavilion. “Popper” had been at the town hall meeting, too, and had volunteered to be on the Task Force.

“How are you today?” “Popper” asked as Carlos joined him on the Pavilion steps. Out loud Carlos responded, “Fine,” while he asking himself, “*Am I really Blue?*” Together they walked into the building for the meeting.