

STD PARTNER SERVICES: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

STD Partner Services have evolved from an exclusive focus on finding the sexual contacts of infected persons to a broad view of the clinical and epidemiologic activities needed to help persons infected with STDs.

The basic process of interviewing infected persons and others potentially involved in transmission, identifying persons still at risk (whether through direct exposure or indirect involvement), and bringing the former to diagnosis and treatment—has changed little, but the context for such activity has been greatly altered.

Partner services play several roles:

- 1) They are a **clinical tool** for identifying a patient's needs and connecting the patient to appropriate care.
- 2) Partner services provide the basis for **assessing local epidemiologic conditions**, targeting resources, and evaluating program performance.
- 3) Follow-up of at-risk partners is a powerful tool for **understanding the dynamics of disease transmission**.

Partner services are offered to individuals who are infected with STDs, to their partners, and to other persons who are at increased risk for infection in an effort to prevent transmission of STDs and to reduce suffering from their complications.

Partner services include:

- providing information regarding current infection(s) and other STDs;
- ensuring confidential notification, appropriate medical attention, and appropriate social referrals for partners and other high-risk individuals;
- using client-centered counseling to develop risk reduction plans to reduce the likelihood of acquiring future STDs;
- providing needed referrals to additional medical or social services; and
- defining and reaching out to those at-risk in the community while assuring complete confidentiality for the patient.

Provision of partner services involves discussion and documentation of highly sensitive personal information about patients and their partners. Therefore, programs must demonstrate the highest regard for individual privacy, and the confidentiality of medical records, disease histories, and related information.