

Rising to the Occasion

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released its 2016 STD Surveillance Report. The news is not good: compared to 2015, chlamydia rates are up 4.5%, gonorrhea rates are up 18.5%, and primary and secondary syphilis 18%. While the current syphilis epidemic in the U.S. has been largely



occurring among men having sex with men, early syphilis increased by 36% among women between 2015 and 2016, and congenital syphilis rates are up 28%. What's worse, while STI rates have been rising for the past 5 years, the Trump administration has proposed to slash CDC's STD prevention budget by 17%. Par for the course for an

administration that promises health care for all by taking away people's health insurance, aims to reduce the government deficit by giving tax breaks to the rich, and promotes world peace by inviting nuclear war.

What is one to do? In the face of so much adversity, why not hang your head low, knowing that things will get (a lot) worse before they get better? Thankfully, most in our field are used to swimming upstream and bad news as cited above seems to do more to energize than defeat us. However, it is critical at this juncture that we come together with like-minded people and forge our shared passion into collaborations aimed at developing and supporting more effective public health policies and programs that promote sexual health and STI prevention.

A few years ago, ASTDA/IUSTI North America initiated formal collaborations with its sister agencies, the American Sexual Health Association (ASHA) and the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSd) by creating ex-officio memberships for these organizations on the ASTDA Executive Committee. While ASTDA's constituency is primarily comprised of STD clinicians and academics, NCSd represents STD public health programs, and ASHA advocates for the sexual health of the general public. In addition, an ex-officio membership was also created for the newly-formed IUSTI Canada branch, thus strengthening collaboration with our northern neighbors. The immediate result has been a closer connection between individuals involved with the different organizations, a free flow of information among participants and a stronger combined effort in mutually beneficial projects, especially the biennial National STD Prevention Conference.

The collaboration was brought to a new level when NCSd invited its partners for a meeting in Washington DC on October 5, 2017. Besides NCSd, ASHA, and ASTDA, there was also representation from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), the National Network of STD Prevention Training Centers (NNPTC), the California Disease Intervention Services Training Centers, and the University of Washington Public Health Capacity Building Center. The initial purpose of the meeting was to map out and identify overlaps and gaps in technical assistance resources that each of these partners provides in support of STD prevention nationally. However, the daylong meeting quickly evolved into a higher-level discussion on national capacity building for sexual health promotion and STD

prevention, including training and technical assistance. At the end of the day, three topics emerged for further collaborative work: stimulate a national discourse on sexual health vs. sexual disease, design a common policy agenda, and develop a joint communication strategy.

In terms of communication, specific recommendations were made on directions for the ASTDA journal *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, including publication of best practices and op-eds directly aimed at clinical and STD prevention providers, the stimulation of publications from the field through publication “boot camps” at conferences, and linkage of the journal to other organizations, for example by providing “digests” from key papers. To be sure, the *journal* has already taken a number of steps in this direction. Two key articles in the [October issue of the Journal](#), one on a logic model to promote sexual health and the other on modernizing partner services are cases in point. Another example is the regular series ["The Real World of STD Prevention"](#) in which free-access papers appear that are of special interest to the STD prevention field. Furthermore, ASTDA in collaboration with the *journal* editor, has sponsored special sessions at past national and international conferences that specifically focus on grant writing and the publication process for young investigators and is planning on conducting similar workshops at the IUSTI World Congress in Dublin (June 27-30, 2018) and the U.S. National STD Prevention Conference in Washington, DC (August 27-30, 2018).

Under the leadership of president Dennis Fortenberry and president-elect Bobbie van der Pol, ASTDA is working to organize a workshop tentatively entitled: ‘Navigating the Intersections of Public Health, Academic Research and Industry’. This workshop invites junior investigators who plan careers in STD research to discuss the different perspectives of academia, public health and industry, as well as have conversations about non-academic health care. More information on the workshop will follow. In the meantime, please take a moment to listen to a brief [podcast interview](#) we did a short while ago.

Kees Rietmeijer – Director North American Region IUSTI
Dennis Fortenberry – President, ASTDA
Bobbie van der Pol – President-Elect, ASTDA

ASHA Updates

World Sexual Health Day was September 4th and featured a theme of *Love, Bonding, and Intimacy*. For the observation ASHA debuted a [podcast](#) with Eli Coleman, PhD, director of the Program in Human Sexuality at the University of Minnesota and a former member of ASHA’s board of directors, featuring his insights on the need to develop a broader view of sexual health that goes beyond merely having sex with another person.



Also in September the National Cervical Cancer Coalition, a program of ASHA, recognized Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Day with activities including a [new podcast](#) discussing gynecologic cancer treatment modalities with Mamta Singhvi, MD, a radiation oncologist and ASHA board member.

With both observations we developed social media campaigns and featured resources including [Ten Questions to Ask about Sexual Health](#) and [Ten Things to Know about HPV](#).

The section of our website for health professionals expanded to include additional checklists for use in treating young patients. These tools are designed to trigger questions and topics to spur discussions with male and female patients, with specific resources for ages 9-14 and age 15 through young adult years, respectively. There are companion patient tools to prep young people for clinic visits and to encourage them to bring up topics of discussion with their providers. These checklists and self-assessment forms are freely available to [download](#).

Lynn Barclay and Fred Wyand
American Sexual Health Association

IUSTI Canada

- The Canadian Preventive Services Task Force has recently published new guidelines on hepatitis C screening. The full document is available at [this link](#). Other resources, including a 2-page FAQ for primary care physicians, and details on the methodology, can also be accessed here.
- Version 2.0 of the mobile application for the Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections was released at the end of May 2017. It is available for both Apple and Android devices, and it is free! The app is interactive and provides quick and easy access to diagnosis and management information on sexually transmitted infections. More information on the app and how to download can be found [here](#).

STD Prevention Online at 10

STD Prevention Online went live 10 years ago on November 2, 2007. This free networking site was specifically designed for the STI workforce and allows users to upload and download a variety of resources. Over the years, the site has attracted a wide variety of national and international users. For its anniversary, STPDO features



3 new podcasts: Derek Freedman and Henry de Vries on the upcoming IUSTI World Congress in Dublin next June; David Harvey, the Executive Director of the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSDD) on what 's going on with his organization; and the already mentioned podcast with

Dennis Fortenberry and Bobbie van der Pol on ASTDA's young investigator initiatives. All and more on <http://www.stdpreventiononline.org>.

From the IUSTI North America Director

- On behalf of IUSTI North America, I was invited to speak at the IUSTI Europe meeting in Helsinki last August on the changing world of STI care.
- As a member of the IUSTI World Executive Committee I was asked to chair the scientific committee of the 2018 IUSTI World Congress – a task I am sharing with Prof. Henry de Vries from the Amsterdam Health Department and the Academic Medical Center. Preparations are in full swing and we are looking forward seeing many of our colleagues in Dublin, June 27-30, 2018. More information elsewhere in this newsletter and on the Congress website www.iusti2018.com, where registration and abstract submission has just opened.

Kees Rietmeijer, MD, PhD
IUSTI North America Regional Director