

Formative qualitative response of MSM with substance use to digital pills for PrEP adherence

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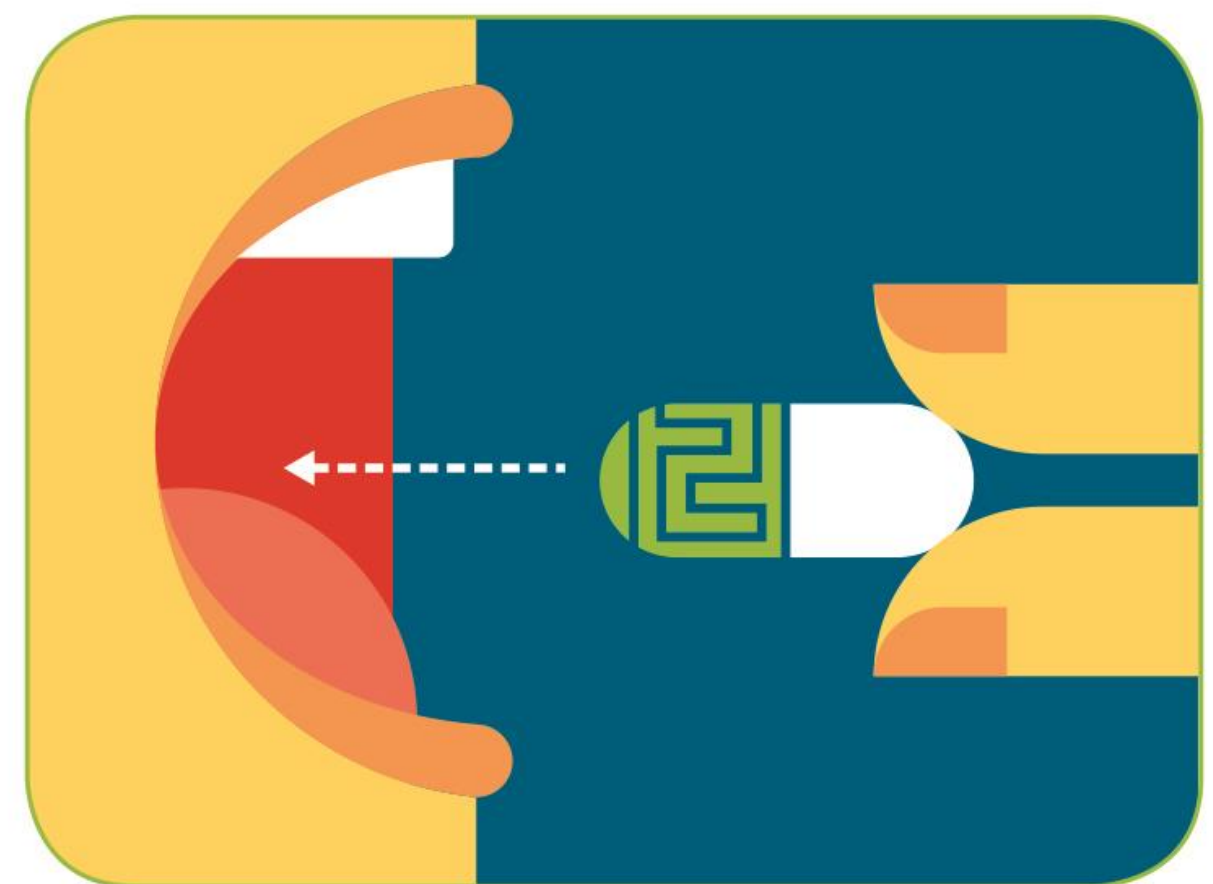
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Introduction

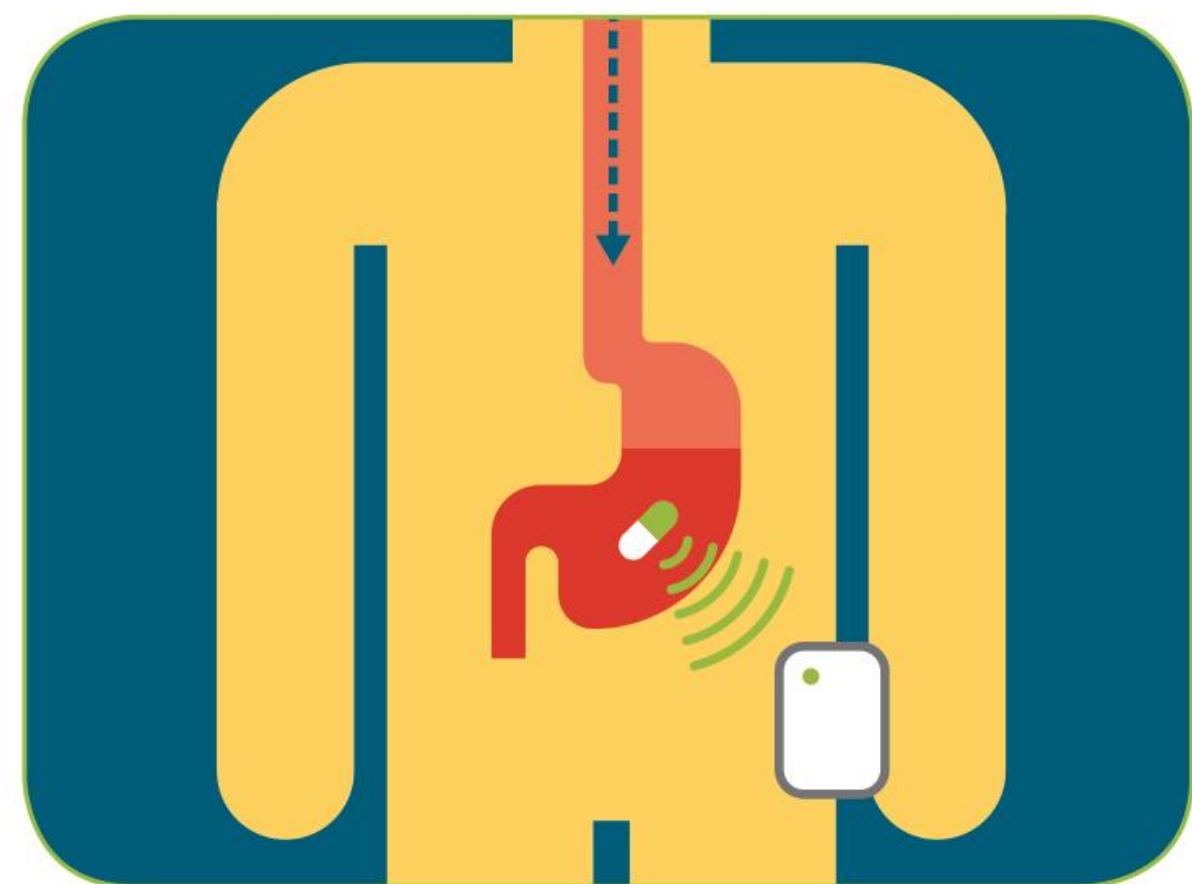
- Digital pills provide real-time verification of medication ingestion events and can be used to monitor adherence.
- Digitized pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) may allow for detection of suboptimal adherence and improve delivery of adherence interventions.

Objectives

- To understand technology optimization factors using semi-structured individual interviews ($N = 15$) with men who have sex with men (MSM) self-reporting substance use other than alcohol.



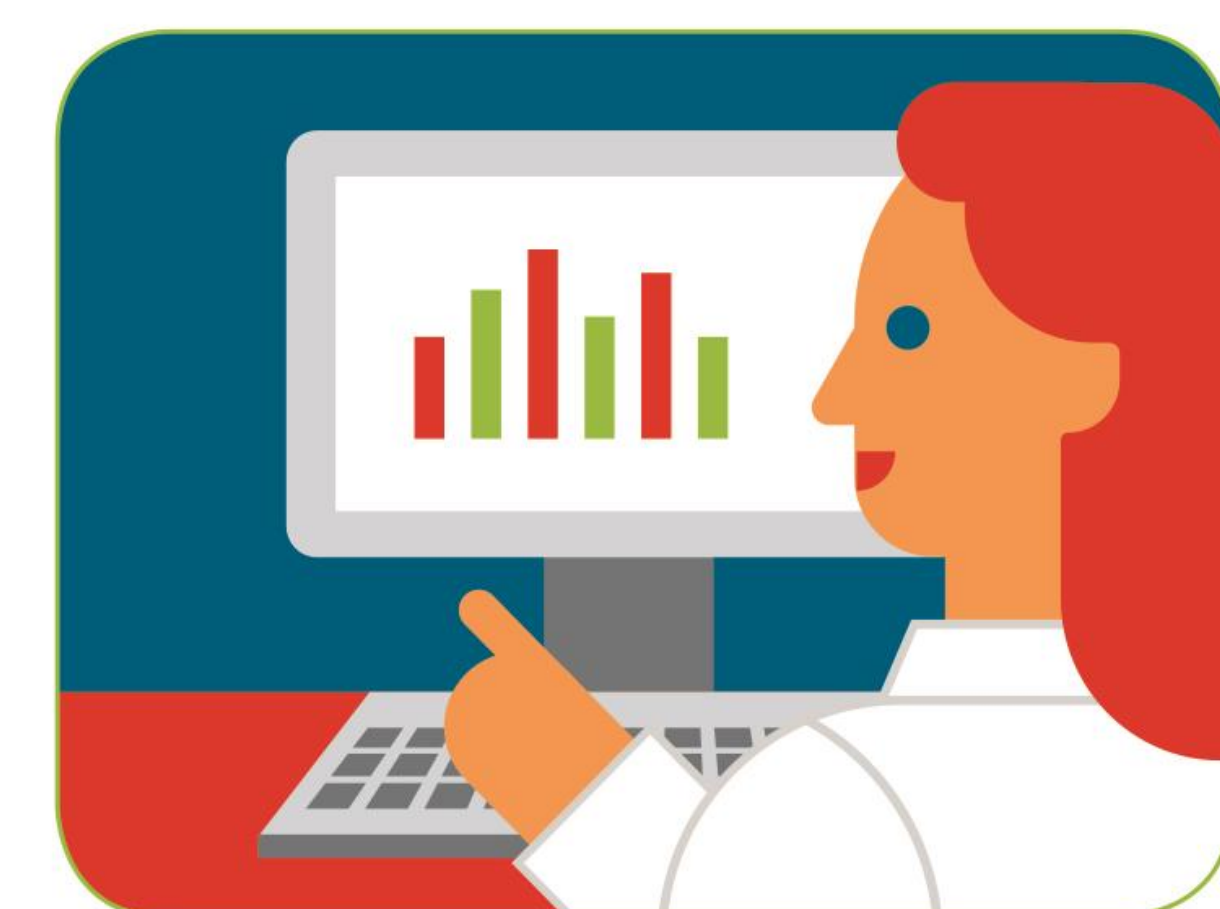
1 The digital pill is ingested.



2 The pill is activated in the stomach and transmits a radio-frequency signal to a hip-worn device.



3 The device collects and transmits ingestion data to a cloud-based server driving an interface.



4 The interface then displays ingestion data to clinicians and patients.

Methods

- These data represent preliminary analyses of 15 in-depth interviews conducted with MSM prior to deployment of digital PrEP.
- **Participants** were 15 HIV-negative MSM, ages 18+, on or qualifying for PrEP, who self-reported non-alcohol substance use in the past 6 months.
- **Individual, semi-structured interviews** explored digital pill technology; adherence reporting; privacy; technology acceptance; and willingness to use and interact with the technology to reinforce adherence and address influencers of adherence.
- **Quantitative assessments** covered demographics, medical history, PrEP use, substance use history, and sexual activity.
- **Statistical analyses** included descriptives and applied thematic analysis of transcribed interviews.

Quantitative Results ($N = 15$)

| | Mean (SD) | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Age (in years) | 36 (11.8) | |
| Sexual partners in past 3 months | 8.9 (14.9) | |
| | n (%) | |
| Race | White | 10 (66.7) |
| | Mixed race | 4 (26.7) |
| | Unknown | 1 (6.7) |
| Ethnicity | Hispanic or Latino | 5 (33.3) |
| | Not Hispanic or Latino | 10 (66.7) |
| Education | Some college / college graduate | 6 (40) |
| | Some graduate school | 3 (20) |
| | Graduate / professional | 6 (40) |
| Sexual orientation | Homosexual | 12 (80) |
| | Bisexual | 3 (20) |
| On PrEP | Yes | 12 (80) |
| | No | 3 (20) |
| Missed doses in past week | Yes | 4 (26.7) |
| | No | 11 (73.3) |
| Substances used | Alcohol | 12 (80) |
| | Marijuana | 9 (60) |
| | Sedatives | 3 (20) |
| | Hallucinogens | 1 (6.7) |
| | Other (e.g., poppers) | 10 (66.7) |

Qualitative Results

- **Theme 1:** Digital pill viewed as acceptable.

“I’d feel like a pioneer. I’d be up for it. I’d be open to it. It’s interesting.” – 23 y/o participant

- **Theme 2:** Digital pills as enhancing PrEP adherence and engagement in care.

“If you do this as instructed, you know 100 percent when you took it, and so there wouldn’t be any question about it.” – 23 y/o participant

“How cool would it be to be able to create a seamless interaction between patient, PCP, other care providers, and family? ... That’d be such a relief for many people, giving them peace of mind that someone is actually taking that medication.” – 59 y/o participant

- **Theme 3:** Willingness to share personal adherence data with physicians.

“I think it’s cool, or interesting, that the PCP or clinician... could reach out and be like, ‘Hey. I see that you’ve missed a couple dosages. What’s going on?’ ... That can be an alert for the provider.” – 31 y/o participant

Qualitative Results (cont.)

- **Theme 4:** Mixed views around sharing data with others, including potential sexual partners.

“I would like to believe we live in a world in which someone’s not lying. If someone says that they’re on PrEP, that they are on PrEP. You don’t have to have someone show their own personal data to prove that.” – 25 y/o participant

“It’s fostering a lot of trust between those two individuals. Then it’s like I’m not hiding anything... When you show the data, it’s like you’re all clear.” – 27 y/o participant

- **Theme 5:** Potential barriers to digital pill use: technological issues, lack of access, substance use, trust/privacy concerns, stigma.

“Is there some sort of GPS tracker? Is this some way to... put something in the bodies of all gay people? ... It almost sounds paranoid to a point, but there, obviously, are those questions.” – 24 y/o participant

“Where would people get this? Who’s giving it out? I think access is the most important thing.” – 31 y/o participant

- **Theme 6:** Desire for customizability across digital pill system, including privacy settings, data sharing, and frequency, timing, and content of messages.

“I think it would be really important to have that conversation before the patient... starts the program to be able to say, ‘I really only need one reminder a day,’ or ‘Please don’t contact me unless I forget to take a dose.’” – 29 y/o participant

Conclusions

- Digital pills to measure PrEP adherence were viewed as acceptable by MSM who use substances.
- Individuals are willing to share real-time adherence data primarily with clinicians, and are willing to engage with text messages and adherence data from digital pills.
- Issues around technology, privacy, and stigma may be potential barriers to use of digital pills.

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