

Screening for Chlamydia in Women: Ensuring the Correct Swab Technique is being used

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1. Aim

To ensure all women accessing Solent Sexual Health Services and using self-taken swabs to screen for chlamydia, either in clinic or via the online screening system, were provided with the correct instructions on swab technique.

To ensure all clinicians involved with either instructing women, or taking the swabs during examination, were using the correct technique.

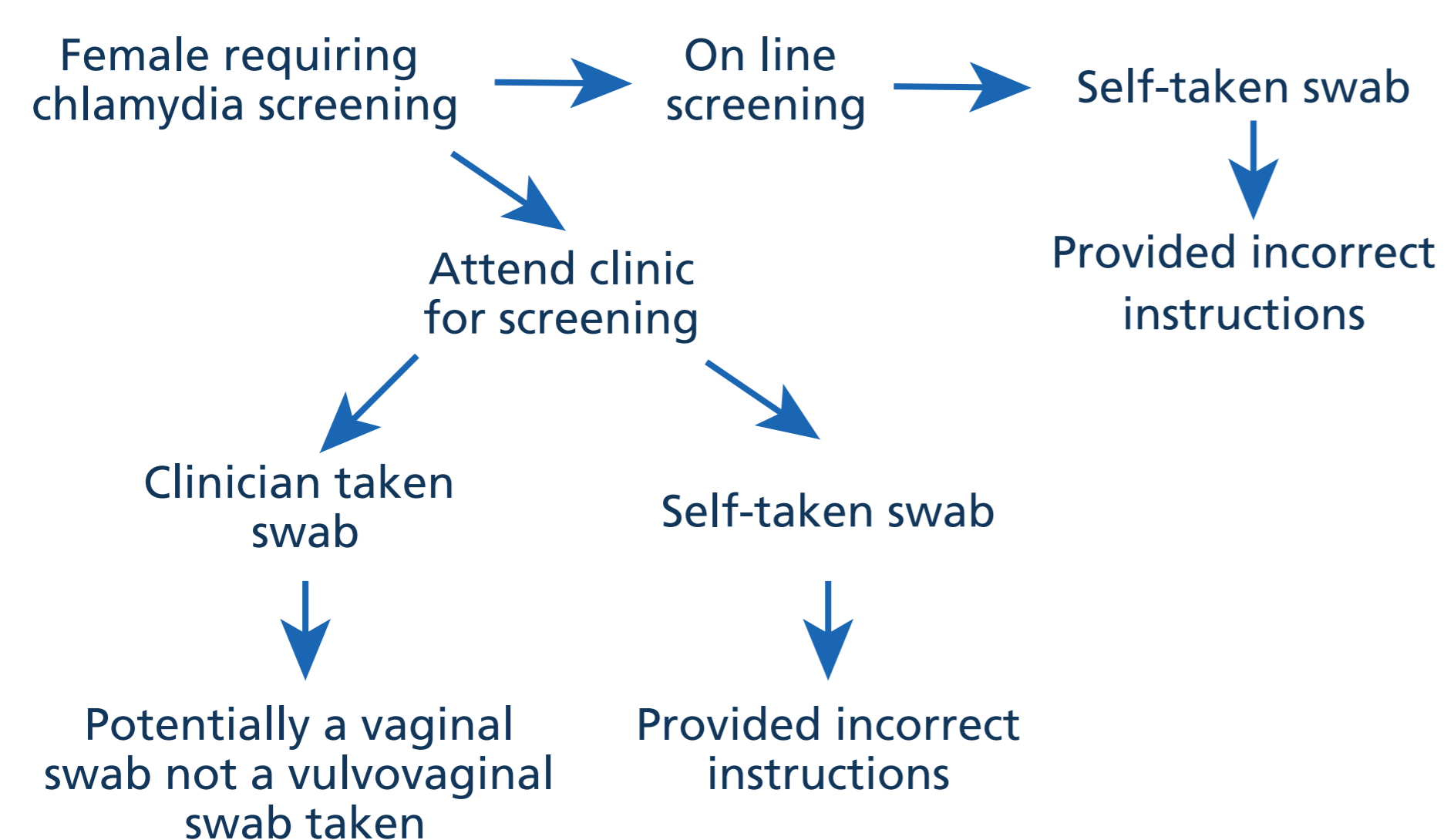
2. Background

Research has shown the optimum swab to screen women for chlamydia is a vulvovaginal swab which can be either self taken or taken by a clinician.¹

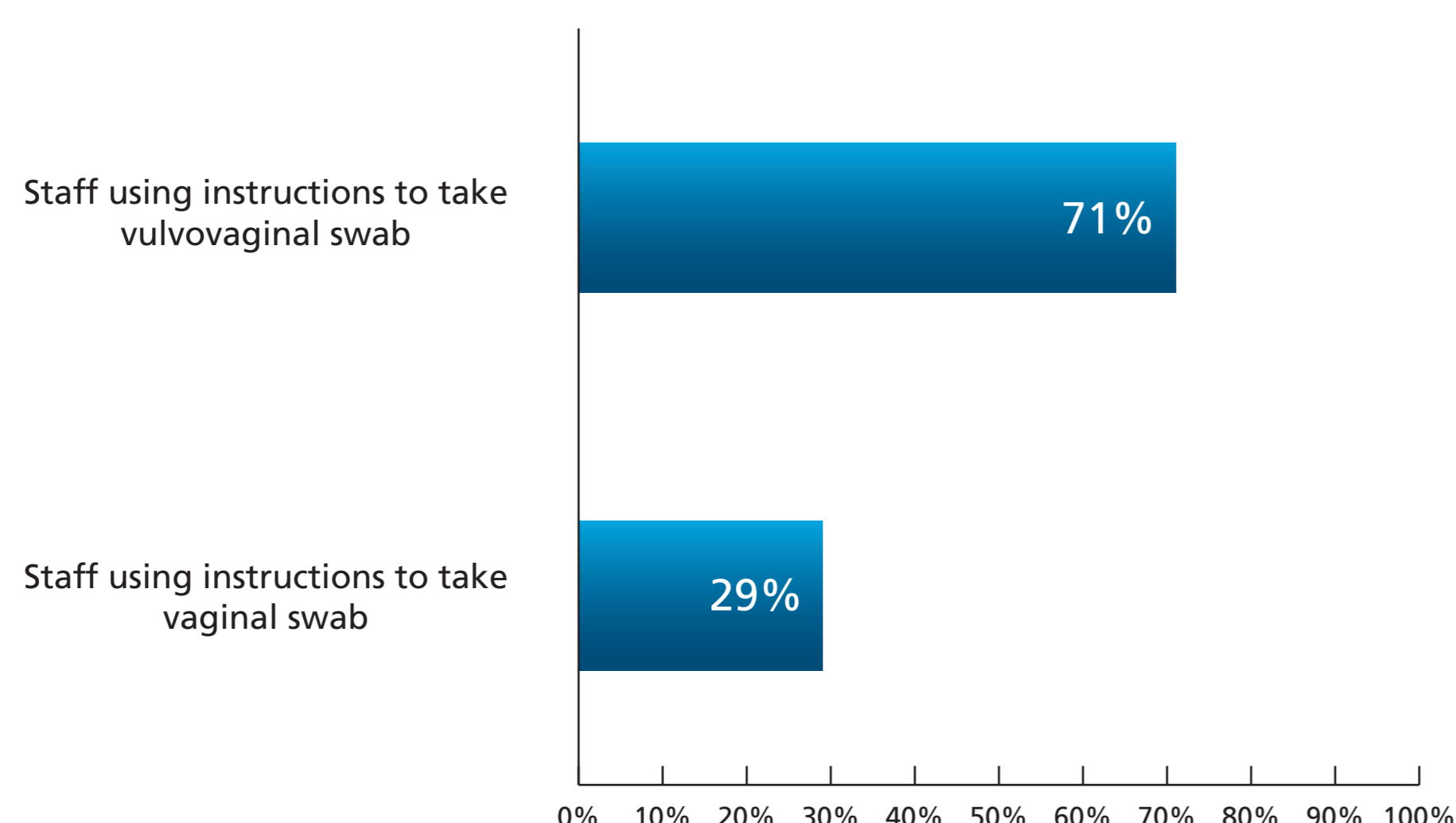
3. Current Practice

It was identified that the incorrect instructions were being provided to patients in the majority of clinics and via the online screening system. The instructions provided were for taking a vaginal swab not a vulvovaginal swab. It was also thought a proportion of clinicians were taking vaginal swabs rather than the correct vulvovaginal swab.

Process map



Survey of Clinicians' own knowledge on how to take the swab



4. Actions Taken

New correct instructions were accessed. These were reproduced with kind permission from the Leeds Centre for Sexual Health. This was the Centre involved in the research demonstrating that the vulvovaginal swab was the optimum swab to use.

Education of clinicians was carried out by:

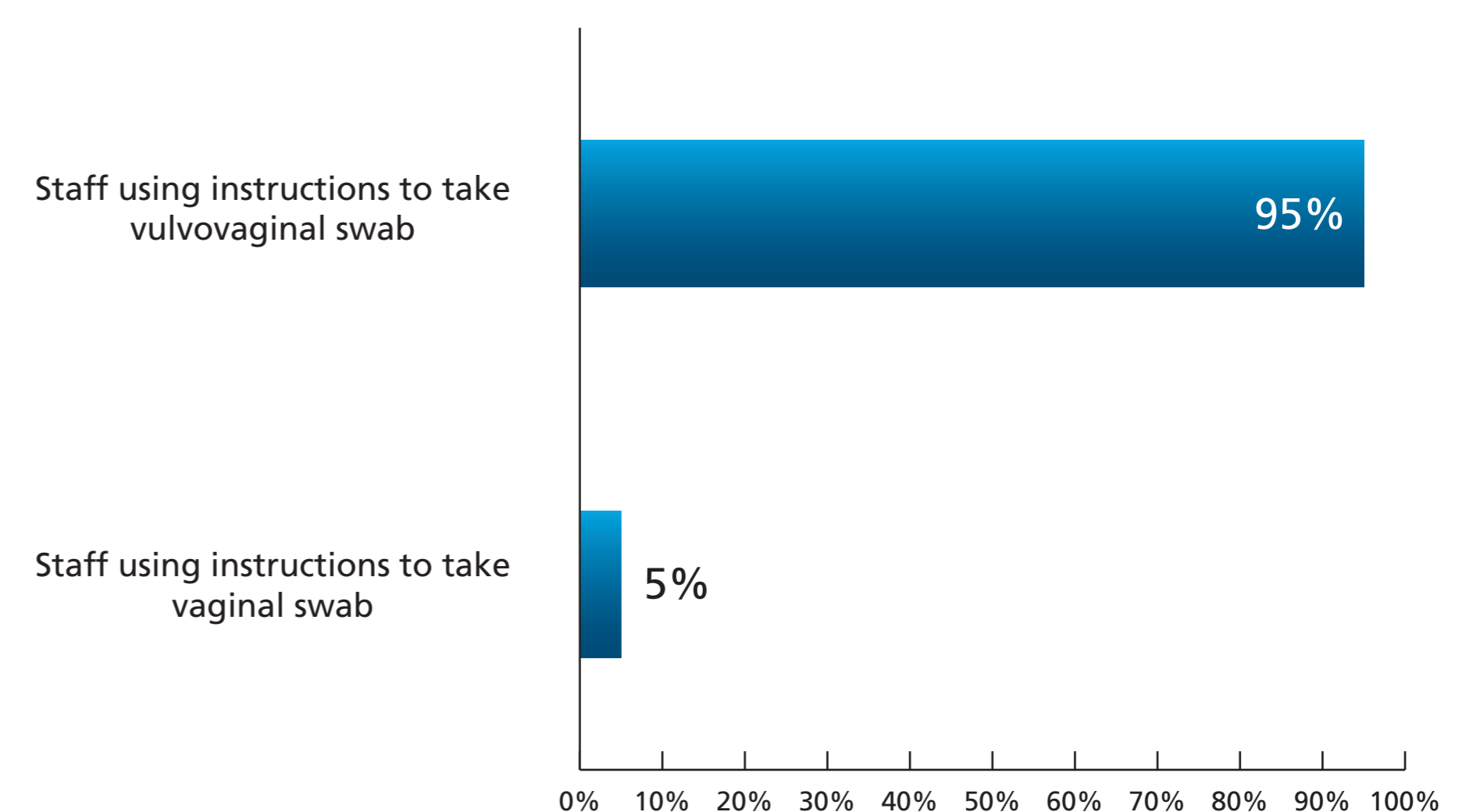
- Sending of a service wide 'Newsflash' email detailing the new correct instructions
- New instructions were placed in the Sexual Services newsletter that is distributed across the service via email
- New instructions were highlighted at the regular educational sessions, which are held across the whole service

5. Evidence of Improvement

The correct instructions are now given to all females taking a self-taken vulvovaginal swab to screen for chlamydia in the clinics and those accessing online screening.

Clinician's knowledge of swab technique has improved

Repeat survey, after actions taken



6. Message to readers

a) General messages

Always be aware that what is presumed to be done correctly may not always be the case.

Always ensure that everyone in the team who is involved in a process has the correct knowledge to be carrying out the task.

b) Specific messages

Other Sexual Health Clinics should be encouraged to check the instructions which are given to women using their services for chlamydia screening, as this may be a more widespread issue.

Further work would include contacting the manufacturers of the swab and informing them that the instructions they provide are not those of the optimum technique required.