

BE, Male, 27 years old, Peer Counselor

As a hidden MSM I usually avoided crowded places for finding sex partners. While I was in Yangon, I find my sex partners through MSM link. Stay near the MSM hotspots and places which have enough privacy and have sex when I got a partner. Then I moved back to Monywa. I have to be very careful in finding my partner since Monywa is my home town. Various people usually hang around along the strand road in Monywa, which is the place where most MSM find their partners. I also went to the strand road by myself when I am free after 8-9pm. But I usually stay in the remote area with dim light where there are not many people because I was afraid of other people thinking of me as a MSM. So I usually find my partner alone.

One day, a peer volunteer from MBCA approached me. I thought he is just a MSM like me and I did not know he is a peer volunteer at that time. Since I usually did not mingle with others, I was arrogant in others' eyes. Whenever volunteers from organisations approached me for health education, I refused it. I assumed that if I accepted them, it became like I admitted that I am MSM. As a result, I had very low awareness of disease and had unprotected sex for many times.

The volunteer from MBCA was very smart. He did not give health education as soon as he approached me. Instead, he tried to build rapport with me. Only later on, he started to share health knowledge with me. As I knew more and more about diseases like HIV, I became worried for my previous risky behavior. He explained more and more as I asked him more and he convinced me to get blood testing. So I promised him to test my blood within the next week. I took one week to prepare my mind before blood testing because of my risky behaviors. I also thought about the way forward after knowing my test results and wanted to share knowledge to other hidden MSM like me.

A couple of days before I tested my blood, my volunteer friend told me that they need a volunteer and suggested me to apply it. So I applied for it and I was selected as a volunteer. As a volunteer, I shared health knowledge with other peer clients. In 2014 I was promoted as a VE Team Leader. Together with peer volunteer educators, we shared health education, distributed IEC materials, and referred clients for testing and treatment. I got training and technical support from Burnet Institute.

In February 2015, we did not need to refer our clients to other organisation for testing as it can be done at MBCA. We were also assigned to do pre and post counseling for HIV testing and assisted referral for ART enrolment for HIV positive clients. As we give our services to MSM clients, we became closer with our clients and gave psychosocial supports to them.

In 2017, I was recruited as a peer counselor staff at MBCA. As a counselor, I did pretest counseling, post test counseling and linked clients with the existing self help groups. It has already been four years that I have been working with MBCA and Burnet Institute. Although I am an engineer, I have gained a lot of health knowledge from MBCA and I am going to share health knowledge and provide psychosocial supports to my peer MSM in the future.