

PRACTICE BASED TEMPLATE

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Media guidelines for reporting on U=U: working with journalists to reduce stigma

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Background/Purpose:

Research has shown a link between low HIV knowledge and stigmatising attitudes. Journalists who are unfamiliar with the evidence behind U=U may be skeptical about the principle and minimize its validity, contributing to stigmatising depictions of HIV in their reporting.

'Media guidelines' are information packs for journalists to guide reporting on specialist subjects, and have been used to inform reporting on topics such as suicide. The development of U=U media guidelines aims to support more factual reporting on HIV transmission, to reduce stigmatising depictions of people living with HIV.

Approach:

A thorough review of existing media guidelines and their use in Australian media identified best practice for development and implementation.

Interviews were conducted with journalists to determine their knowledge of HIV and U=U. Journalists were asked what barriers might prevent them from using available media guidelines.

Interviews with PLHIV identified their views about depictions of HIV in news media they found stigmatising, and how this might be addressed.

Based on this research, a set of media guidelines was developed to improve journalists' understanding of HIV transmission risk in relation to U=U. The guidelines were promoted to media contacts.

Outcomes/Impact:

PLHIV interviewed said omissions of information about U=U in news media contributed to false and stigmatising views of PLHIV as posing a risk to others. Journalists said that a lack of easy access to clear, authoritative information and time pressures were barriers to increasing their understanding of U=U.

The guidelines developed accounted for pressured work environments of Australian journalists with clear, concise information. Examples of stigmatising HIV reporting

were used to show how the inclusion of U=U messages could reduce stigmatising depictions of PLHIV.

Innovation and Significance:

These are the first such guidelines produced globally, and are an innovative example of a stigma-reducing activity that connects media practice to clinical and community experience and expertise.

Disclosure of Interest Statement (example):

ASHM received funding from Gilead Australia to develop these media guidelines.