

UNDERSTANDING THE VIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN HIV EXPERTS ON NON-SPECIALIST PRESCRIPTION OF HIV PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PREP)

Smith, A K J¹, Newman C E¹, Hughes S², Truong H M², Holt M¹

¹ Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Sydney

² Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, University of California, San Francisco

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Background: The broadening of access to HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in Australia has sparked a return to debates about which types of prescribing clinicians are best suited to deliver HIV prevention innovations, such as dedicated and specialist providers (including s100 prescribers) or primary care physicians and general practitioners (GPs). We conducted qualitative interviews to explore equitable access to PrEP in Australia, with a focus on the issue of non-specialist GPs providing PrEP.

Methods: Expert stakeholders in HIV prevention were identified across all Australian jurisdictions and invited via email to participate in an interview. Interviews were conducted between May and August 2017 over the phone, through Skype or in person. Of 29 participants invited to participate, 21 were interviewed. Participants held professional roles in policy or policy/advocacy (n=9), clinical service provision (n=5), research (n=5), and health promotion (n=2). A thematic analysis was conducted.

Results: We developed three themes as probes: (1) 'Non-specialist GPs are well prepared for the demands of PrEP prescribing'; (2) 'Non-specialist GPs present a potential risk to people seeking PrEP'; and (3) 'Non-specialist GPs are a threat to our known ways of doing HIV prevention'. Participants expressed views that fit across multiple themes. Non-specialist GPs were constructed by participants as either well-suited to prescribing PrEP or as posing a risk of perpetrating discrimination towards (gay) patients. For most participants, GPs were imagined as a homogenous group of practitioners.

Conclusion: Stakeholders in the HIV sector were cautious about non-specialist GPs prescribing PrEP, and had concerns about a potential lack of cultural competency regarding diverse sexualities. These findings suggest that a sense of HIV expertise and control is challenged by the involvement of non-specialist GPs with prescribing PrEP. Future research could address the experiences of non-specialist GP in prescribing PrEP and the experiences of patients attending general practice for PrEP.

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