

HIV IN PRACTICE: CURRENT APPROACHES AND CHALLENGES IN THE DIAGNOSIS, TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF HIV IN AUSTRALIA

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Background:

Improved interventions mean that practitioners' key considerations are shifting from issues of acute treatment and patient survival to age-related comorbidities, toxicities associated with chronic therapy, and ongoing health maintenance. Within this context, we explored attitudes across a number of areas in the management of HIV in Australia.

Methods:

We surveyed 56 Australian practitioners currently involved in managing HIV: s100 General Practitioners (s100 GPs; n=26), Sexual Health Physicians (SHPs; n=24), and Hospital-Based Physicians (HBPs; n=6). Each participant completed a 20-minute online quantitative survey between October and November 2017. Forty-seven questions were asked regarding topics including triggers for testing for HIV, timing of treatment initiation, therapy choices, and areas of unmet need.

Results:

Survey results for practice approaches and challenges were broadly consistent across the three practitioner specialties, apart from a few key areas. A higher proportion of s100 GPs nominated older HIV treatments as their preferred choices for newly diagnosed patients compared with SHPs (23% s100 GPs reported zidovudine and 12% Atripla[®] as top treatments, with no mentions from SHPs). In contrast with SHPs, s100 GPs were less likely to switch HIV therapies to simplify the treatment protocol (88% versus 58%, respectively; p=0.019). Considerably lower levels of satisfaction with current HIV practice guidelines were also reported by s100 GPs (83% of SHPs very satisfied versus 46% of s100 GPs). Across all specialties, increasing patient access to mental health services was reported as a key management issue (mentioned by 36% of all practitioners).

Conclusion:

Greater support for s100 GPs may be needed to address identified challenges including treatment selection and alignment with practice guidelines. Further exploration of s100 GP approaches involving a much larger sample size is warranted. A renewed focus on providing improved mental health and wellbeing supports is also recommended, particularly in the face of an ageing HIV population.

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