

## Adherence to weekly anal self-examination among men who have sex with men for detection of anal syphilis

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**Background:** Men who have sex with men (MSM) practising exclusively receptive anal sex are more likely to present with secondary than primary syphilis, implying primary anorectal lesions may be missed. If men could detect anorectal lesions in the primary stage by regular anal self-examination, the duration of infectiousness could be reduced. This study aimed to examine the adherence to weekly anal self-examination.

**Method:** We conducted a longitudinal feasibility study examining the adherence to weekly anal self-examinations among MSM attending a sexual health clinic in Melbourne, Australia, between December 2020 and June 2021. We recruited MSM who were age 18 years or older and living in Victoria, Australia. The participants were asked to perform weekly anal self-examination over 12 weeks. We assessed adherence by asking the participants to complete a logbook and 4-weekly surveys. Participants who identified abnormalities in their anus were recommended to seek medical review. All men had a negative syphilis serology at baseline.

**Results:** Of 30 men enrolled in the study, anal self-examination was performed at least weekly for 308 of 360 person-weeks (86% of the weeks, 95% CI: 82-89). The mean adherence was 3.6 (95% CI: 3.3-3.9) examinations per four-weeks per person in Weeks 1-4, 3.5 (95% CI: 3.1-3.8) in Weeks 5-8 and 3.3 (95% CI: 2.9-3.7) in Weeks 9-12 ( $P_{\text{trend}}=0.06$ ). Six men (20%) were seen for medical review after they identified abnormalities, whilst eight men (27%) reported abnormalities, but they did not seek medical review. No participants were diagnosed with syphilis during the study period.

**Conclusion:** We conclude that men adhered well to weekly anal self-examination and therefore feasible as a routine practice among MSM. A relatively high proportion of men reported abnormal findings although only half returned for medical review.

### Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Financial interests: All authors have no financial conflicts of interest to declare.

Non-financial interest: EPFC is supported by an Australian NHMRC Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant (GNT1172873). CKF is supported by an Australian NHMRC Leadership Investigator Grant (GNT1172900). JJO is supported by an Australian NHMRC Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant (GNT1193955). ETA is supported by Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) scholarship from Monash University and Research Entry Scholarship from the Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine, Royal Australasian College of Physician. JT is supported by Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship from Monash University. All other authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.