

# **“IT LETS PEOPLE HAVE MORE PERSONAL AGENCY WITH THEIR OWN HEALTH”: PERCEPTIONS OF STI-PrEP AMONG GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN**

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## **Introduction:**

Novel strategies for the prevention of sexually transmissible infections (STIs) in gay and bisexual men are needed to combat the increasing incidence of bacterial STIs and decreasing rates of condom use. The use of doxycycline as STI pre-exposure prophylaxis (STI-PrEP) is an emergent strategy that is the subject of ongoing investigation. We collected qualitative data on gay and bisexual men's perceptions of STI-PrEP to inform prospective implementation.

## **Methods:**

In 2018, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 gay and bisexual men living in Sydney. Participants were recruited via research databases and social media then selected based on a recent diagnosis with an STI, regular STI screening and HIV status – either HIV-positive or HIV-negative and on PrEP. Interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

## **Results:**

All 10 participants were cautiously optimistic about STI-PrEP with many suggesting the need for a stronger evidence base. Key concerns included side effects – particularly gastrointestinal and enduring side effects – antibiotic resistance and effectiveness. Participants identified numerous potential benefits, which included: decreasing STIs at an individual and community-level, increasing STI testing, enhancing discussions around sexual health and reducing associated stigma. All participants would consider taking STI-PrEP and none of the participants were overtly resistant. The majority of participants would prefer daily dosing over episodic or event-driven dosing. None of the participants believed that taking STI-PrEP would have any impact on their current sexual practices. Interestingly, two participants had previously taken doxycycline with the intention of preventing STIs. The importance of avoiding STIs was largely centered on preventing transmission to others in the community rather than for personal reasons.

## **Conclusion:**

While concerns were present, all participants would consider taking STI-PrEP, suggesting that the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived risks. Importantly, addressing these concerns and providing advice on management of side effects may improve acceptability.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this study.

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