

CHALLENGES IN THE CARE OF REFUGEE WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV IN A REGIONAL TOWN.

Authors: Orr C¹, Coelli L¹, Davidson A¹

¹Gateway Health HIV Clinic

Background: Regional towns are increasingly becoming areas of settlement for refugees from African backgrounds including women living with HIV. These women have challenging needs in managing their HIV. Consequently Gateway Health HIV Clinic has had to develop strategies to meet the needs of these women while ensuring best practice in HIV care.

Argument: The Gateway Health HIV Clinic was established in 2015 in response to the arrival of a number of refugee women from Democratic Republic of the Congo who were living with HIV. The women have come to Australia via the Humanitarian Program as single women (often with children) on a Women at Risk Visa category. These women are highly anxious about disclosure of their diagnosis to the small African community, primarily due to the discrimination around HIV in their country of origin.

Difficulties in managing these women arises in many circumstances including management of pregnancy and breastfeeding, management of their children living with HIV, accessing HIV medication from with community or hospital pharmacy, attending for pathology tests, engaging in new sexual relationships, school camps or excursions and arranging transport to specialist appointments. These women will also not engage with any of the existing HIV support networks. The women report feeling vulnerable, frightened and alone.

Outcomes: Women from an African refugee background living with HIV in a regional setting are a particularly vulnerable group. Gateway Health HIV Clinic has responded to these needs through unique and responsive management strategies.

Conclusion: Reduction of stigma for people living with HIV has come a long way in Australia however the needs of diverse populations in regional settings present additional challenges.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

No disclosures