

Beyond Viral Suppression: Lived Experience of Motherhood, Clinical Stigma and Workforce Gaps in HIV care in Australia

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Background/Purpose:

Australia has achieved near elimination of vertical HIV transmission through effective antiretroviral therapy, multidisciplinary maternity care, and national treatment guidelines. However, biomedical success does not fully address the lived realities of women navigating pregnancy and motherhood with HIV. Clinical stigma, inconsistent documentation practices and workforce knowledge gaps continue to affect patient experience, particularly in maternity and neonatal care settings

Approach:

This practice-based presentation draws to lived experience as a women living with HIV who gave birth in Australia in 2020 while virally suppressed and engaged in specialist care. Using reflective analysis grounded in professional social work practice, the presentation examines key areas of tension within healthcare delivery, documentation of HIV status in newborn records, communication practices by clinicians, access and cost considerations for early infant HIV testing, and the impact of workforce knowledge gaps. Lived experience is positioned as a form of expertise to inform system improvements

Outcomes/Impact:

The presentation identifies opportunities to strengthen stigma informed communication, standardise confidentiality-sensitive documentation practices, and reinforce equitable access to newborn HIV testing. It highlights the importance of integrating contemporary HIV education across all levels of medical training to improve clinician confidence and patient trust

Innovation and Significance:

While Australia HIV response is often measured by viral suppression rates, this work shifts the focus towards dignity confidentiality and clinical culture. By embedding lived experience into workforce education and maternity care reform, the presentation proposes a practical framework for advancing person centred stigma free HIV care. Sustaining national progress requires not only biomedical excellence but ongoing investment in education, equity and humanity in health care delivery

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The presenter is a woman living with HIV and a qualified social worker. This presentation includes personal lived experience and professional reflections. The presenter declares no financial conflicts of interest and as not received pharmaceutical industry or commercial sponsorship related to this work