Exploring the Awareness and Acceptability of Screening Methods for Anal Intraepithelial Neoplasia in the HIV-positive Men who have Sex with Men Population

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Anal Intraepithelial Neoplasia: A Rising Concern?

Rates of AIN are increasing globally in parallel with anal SCC diagnoses, which have risen by 56% in the UK since 1990.

There are multiple risk factors but three are most significant:

- 1. High risk sexual behaviours
- 2. Exposure to HPV, particularly strains 16 and 18
- 3. HIV infection

HIV positive men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM) are at a **>100-fold** increased risk of developing anal SCC compared to male controls.

No formal screening programme exists in high risk groups due to a lack of evidence for their efficacy.

Methods

A targeted patient information leaflet was designed and distributed to HIV-positive MSM prior to routine clinic appointments. Having read this, respondents were invited to complete a survey assessing existing knowledge and the utility of the PIL.

Results

172 surveys were completed with an acceptance rate of 87.0% and a modal age range of 45-54 (n=50).

Awareness

Awareness of AIN was very low:

- Only 13.4% of respondents had heard of AIN before
- Interestingly more knew about: the symptoms (23.8%), the increased risk that HIV infection posed (19.2%) and that AIN could lead to anal SCC (15.7%)
- Only 23 (13.4%) respondents self-examined regularly, 55 (32.0%) did so rarely and 94 (54.6%) never did so

Acceptability

Support for a screening programme was high:

- 83.1% of respondents stated they would participate
- The preferred method was anal examination by a healthcare worker (82.6%)

The Patient Information Leaflet

84.9% respondents read the leaflet:

- All found it was well laid out, easy to read and understand
- 14.4% said that after reading it they did not feel confident performing anal self-examination

Conclusions

The short study period limited the scope and sample size but the findings serve to inform the development and implementation of a screening service for AIN.

Healthcare workers have a duty to promote self-examination and, should evidence emerge for it's efficacy, they should offer anal examinations at patients' routine appointments.

Knowledge of AIN is low in this high-risk group and there is a clear need for education. This could be achieved using a patient information leaflet such as the one utilised in this study.

Support for a screening programme is strong and these findings predict good patient uptake should a screening programme be introduced.

Current Knowledge2	Knowledge gained
HIV positive MSM have a higher risk of developing AIN and anal SCC	Knowledge of AIN is low in HIV positive MSM and there is a clear need for education
There is no evidence for the efficacy of screening methods for AIN	Anal examination by Healthcare Workers (HCWs) would be the most acceptable form of screening
HPV infection by high-risk strains is the main factor in the development of AIN. There is currently a vaccine for this but it is not offered to men despite BASHH recommendations	Once educated in how to perform anal self-examination many patients would be more prepared to, although some would still prefer to be examined by HCWs