



GPS' EXPERIENCES OF TESTING PEOPLE BORN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND SOUTH EAST ASIA FOR HIV

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CONTEXT AND AIMS

General practitioners (GPs) play an important role in Australia's HIV response, particularly in facilitating HIV testing among migrants. Currently, around a third of HIV notifications among people born in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and South East Asia (SEA) are diagnosed late. Two previous studies found only 33%¹ to 50%² of people born in SEA or SSA had ever tested for HIV, despite seeing their GP regularly. This research investigated barriers and motivators influencing GPs' in testing patients from SSA and SEA for HIV.

METHODS

Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with 11 GPs from Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. GPs were recruited through word of mouth, advertisements in online newsletters, and social media posts. Interviews were around 30 minutes long, and were thematically coded using NVivo software.

FINDINGS

GPs reported initiating HIV testing on most occasions, with few direct requests from patients. While several factors increased the likelihood, others impeded upon GPs readiness to test a patient from SSA and SEA for HIV.

MOTIVATORS TO INITIATING HIV TESTING

GP interest and experience in HIV was reported to increase confidence in initiating HIV testing. Patient disclosure of high risk activity, requests for sexual health screening, as well as routine testing during antenatal visits also provided opportunities to more easily offer HIV tests. Access to reliable and confident interpreters of the same gender facilitated cross-cultural interactions, whereas inability to do so impeded initiation of testing.

CHALLENGES TO INITIATING HIV TESTING

GPs identified lack of time as a major impediment to discussions regarding testing for HIV. Other barriers included GP expectations about cultural and religious values held by patients - noting concern of offending, or making patients anxious or uncomfortable by offering HIV testing. Such assumptions also influenced GP perceptions of patient likelihood of being at risk for HIV, as well as their willingness to test.

GPs PERCEPTION OF PATIENT BARRIERS TO HIV TESTING

Patient fear of a positive HIV result may serve as a barrier to uptake of testing. This fear was due to concerns around immigration implications, perception of HIV as a death sentence and HIV-related stigma resulting in social exclusion. Misconceptions around routes of transmission and low risk perception and concerns about cost and confidentiality were common concerns raised by patients. GPs noted that addressing these concerns during pre-test counselling increased testing uptake.

SO WHAT?

Migrants born in SSA and SEA are considered a priority group for HIV testing in Australia, and regularly visit their GP. However, many have never tested for HIV. The framing of HIV testing as a 'routine' public health practice, alongside access to interpreters confident in discussing HIV and navigating cultural gaps, could increase GPs readiness to initiate HIV testing. In addition, broader public health initiatives tailored for priority communities that focus on addressing HIV-related stigma and that encourages uptake of testing could assist in reducing late diagnosis.

REFERENCES

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