

EXPERIENCES OF HIV AND THE ROLE OF HIV PEER SUPPORT

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Background/Purpose:

Since 1992, in several forms, Seroconversion studies have played an important role in the Australian HIV response in understanding the circumstances of HIV infection. The latest version of the study, which was expanded beyond recent seroconverters to include individuals diagnosed within the previous 24 months, found that in addition to other benefits, accessing peer-support was also associated with changes in sexual behavior and increased HIV status disclosure.

Approach:

In partnership with state-based health departments and community-based HIV service organisations, NHMRC funding was sought to continue the work of the Seroconversion Study in a rapidly changing HIV prevention, care, and support landscape. The study will employ a mixed-method approach using both quantitative and qualitative data collection. We will establish an online prospective open cohort study of up to 1,000 people newly diagnosed with HIV, recruited over 3 years with up to 24-months follow up.

Outcomes/Impact:

In 2017, funding was secured from the NHMRC for this work, bringing together, for the first time, government, clinical, and community partners across all jurisdictions on a project specifically focused on people recently diagnosed with HIV. The study will determine the relationship between the use of HIV care and support services; self-rated quality-of-life, mental-health status, and social connectedness; HIV risk reduction and sexual practice; and engagement with HIV specialist care and use of antiretroviral therapy.

Innovation and Significance:

This will be the first prospective cohort study to address how specific attributes of HIV support services and less formal forms of support address barriers to progression along the continuum of care, to physical and emotional well-being, to reducing the risk of onward transmission and to treatment uptake and adherence. This national, multilevel collaboration will assess how best to ensure consistent access to peer support for all persons newly diagnosed with HIV.

Disclosure of Interest Statement (example):

The Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine recognises the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.