

PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS IN AUSTRALIAN HIV CURE STUDIES INVOLVING ANALYTICAL TREATMENT INTERRUPTION

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Key words: HIV Cure; Clinical trial; Biomedical sciences (e.g. laboratory-based); Social sciences; Clinical sciences

Background:

Clinical studies investigating strategies to cure HIV are increasingly using analytical treatment interruptions (ATI), or closely monitored pauses in antiretroviral therapy (ART), to test the intervention. Little is known about the motivations and experiences of participants in these trials. This study aimed to understand perspectives of participants during an HIV cure-related clinical trial conducted in Melbourne.

Methods:

In depth interviews were conducted with Australian participants (n=5) of the TITAN study (broadly neutralising antibodies and vesatolimod with ATI) in 2022. Interviews focused on reasons for participation, experiences, and perspectives on ATI. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis.

Results:

Participants were motivated to be part of the trial for a range of reasons including: supporting HIV community, interest in cure science, and optimism for improved HIV treatment or cure. Participants did not have concerns for their health due to ATI and appreciated the opportunity to pause ART. Anxiety about breaking their ART regimen was reported, due to long-time reliance on, and trust in, daily ART. Participants had mixed feelings about viral rebound: gratitude for their health and for ART; excitement to have experienced the possibility of extended viral suppression; and, for some, disappointment about the speed of viral rebound. While some participants experienced mild side-effects, a high level of trust in the clinical research team, and confidence in their own knowledge of their body and health, were seen by participants as protective against adverse effects.

Conclusion:

Daily ART is integral to people's experience of living well with HIV and pausing ART can be confronting. Nevertheless, participants in this trial felt positive about their experiences due to a sense of contributing to significant advances in HIV science.

Trust in the research team was essential to ensuring participants felt safe, and optimistic, about the trial and advances toward a cure.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors disclose no conflicts of interest