

Meeting the Needs of the Adolescents with HIV

Busi Nkala

*Perinatal HIV Research Unit
University of the Witwatersrand
Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital
Johannesburg, South Africa*

AIDS Priorities: Controversies in HIV

Overview

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Introduction

- Adolescence is a unique stage in the human life cycle that causes many challenges with the transition from childhood to adulthood.
- Adolescents have special healthcare needs and health related problems which they are often reluctant to address
- Adolescent includes young people ages 12 – 19
- They are at high risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmissible diseases
- They are likely to have been exposed to HIV and infected

Introduction

- Young people face more complex challenges to their health and development than their parents did
- Major health problems for young people are largely preventable
- There is recognition that young people need services that are sensitive to their stage of development
- HIV is a major threat for young people and require different approach than in any other population group

Case

“Anna” is a fifteen year old girl who was diagnosed with HIV when she was 2 years of age. At that stage, her whole family went for testing, and both her mom and dad and her 4 year old brother were HIV infected. When Anna was 7, her brother died of HIV. When she was 11, her mom died of HIV. Presently she lives with her dad, who is well controlled on HAART. Anna is a clever girl, who excels academically at school. She has been on various ART regimens (starting off with d4T and 3TC as dual therapy in the late 1990’s). Anna is aware of her status, and has disclosed her status to one friend when she was 12 years old.

Her school is not aware of her status.

Case Cont'

Despite being aware of her status and the need to take her meds, she does not adhere and has persistent viremia and a CD4 count of 350. We have instituted alarms on her cell phone, pill boxes, father overseeing her meds, psychological therapy. All this has not helped

- She says her meds make her skin dark and distort her body
- She says the meds interfere with her life-style: going to movies with her friends and sleep over: she has not disclosed to all her friends
- She wants to start a relationship with a boy
- She understands HIV and is aware that by not taking her meds she could die: she just does not seem to care!

Stages of Healthy Adolescent Development

Stages	Characteristics Development Milestones and Tasks
Physical Growth	Puberty: rapid growth. Secondary sexual characteristics
Intellectual/ Cognition	Concrete thoughts dominates “here and now” Stronger self awareness Cause effect relationship better understood
Autonomy	Emerging independence, loneliness, challenges authority, argumentative and disobedient
Body image	Preoccupation with physical changes, interest in personal attractiveness
Peer group	Intense friendship with same sex, contact with opposite sex in groups, sexual drives emerges and begins explore ability to date and attract partner
Identity development	Begin to develop own value system, emerging sexual feeling and exploration, desire for privacy. Magnify own problem: “no one understand” Experimentation – sex, drug, friend, jobs, risk-taking behaviour

Themes

Body Image

- Treatment is life saving – she experiences physical changes from side effects

Peer Group

- Taking medication may interfere with day to day activities - desire to be part of the group may outweigh her concerns about her health having to take the treatment with her
- Has a desire to have a dating partner - making important and lifelong decisions

Themes (2)

Identity Development

- A young person has to carry pills around, remember to take medication as scheduled
- She has reached a stage where she does not care about the consequence of not taking her medication

Autonomy

- Non conformity to a world designed by adults
- Difficulty discussing her wishes with her father or health care provider

Challenges

Concerns

- Disclosure
 - Rejection
- Confidentiality
- Inconvenience
- Denial
 - Unsafer sex practices
 - HIV transmission
- Stigma
 - Prevention messages
- Complicated medical regimen
 - Non-adherence
- Difficult negotiating health care system issues
- Low self esteem
 - Depression

Challenges (2)

Access to care

- Youth may not know when is the right time to test for HIV
 - Is readiness assessed by date of birth
- Issues around modes of transmission
 - Vertical vs. own behavioral transmission
- Equity of health services
 - Private vs. public
 - Gender
- Trained professionals to deal with this age group
- Support for parents/guardians/caregiver

Needs

Issues at Initial Diagnosis

- Denial
- Parental involvement
- Fear of disclosure
- Relationships with other HIV infected individuals
- Access to care
- Youth-friendly treatment environment



Needs (2) Information

- Age and developmentally appropriate
- Circumstance relevant
- Correct literacy and language level

Content

- Understanding their bodies
- Modes of HIV transmission
- Wellness management
- Treatment preparedness
- Side effect of treatment
- Avoidance of secondary infections

Needs (3)

HIV Specific Care

Psychosocial support to:

- adjust to HIV status
- tune into his/her own personal experience
- Identify resources to offer emotional support
 - Family, friends, peers, other adults etc.
- deal with isolation
- challenge discrimination
- promote quality of life
- promote treatment adherence
- sexual health care

Needs (4)

Transition to Adult Care

- Age/ developmental stage
- Preparation for transition
- Knowledge of health care issues
- Degree of adult independence
- Involvement of adult health care team
- Issues around relationships and fertility

Needs (5)

Health Care Provider Issues

- Staff diversity
- Knowledge of adolescent growth and development
- Personal adolescent experience
- Patience and flexibility

Conclusion

- Revision of health care provision systems for adolescent
- Coordinated and holistic approach by all stakeholders
- Slot HIV and management in science subjects such as biology and hygiene
- More research and development of teaching provision for health professionals to understand their needs and for young people to be included in the design of teen-friendly services

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