HIV infection and menstrual abnormalities

The number of women infected by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is increasing. The incidence of lower genital tract intraepithelial neoplasia and infection has been well documented. There are, however, few data on menstrual abnormalities in these women. Reports of an increased prevalence of amenorrhea need further evaluation since factors such as substance misuse, prescribed drugs such as methadone and weight loss can significantly affect the menstrual cycle. Possible HIV-related causes include premature ovarian failure, secondary to opportunistic infections such as cytomegalovirus or autoimmunity resulting from the polyclonal gammopathy associated with HIV infection.

To assess the prevalence of menstrual dysfunction in HIV seropositive women a retrospective analysis was performed of the menstrual histories from women attending two genitourinary clinics in London. Those patients who were pregnant, post menopausal or on hormonal contraception were excluded from analysis. Of the 58 women remaining, 8 (72.4%) had regular menstrual cycles, 10 (17.2%) had oligomenorrhea and six (10.4%) had amenorrhea. Analysis of these data revealed that of the women with amenorrhea, two were current intravenous drug users and four were on methadone maintenance. Similarly, of the women with oligomenorrhea, two were current intravenous drug users, four were on methadone maintenance and three were taking cocaine.

Our findings initially suggested a higher prevalence of amenorrhea and oligomenorrhea in HIV seropositive women in comparison with the general population. However, this difference is not sustained once substance misuser's and patients on methadone maintenance have been excluded. The number of women with severe immunosuppression (CD4 < 200) in this study was less than 10% and symptomatology may change as increasing numbers of women survive prolonged periods of immunosuppression. A continuing long term prospective study of this subject, with case matched controls is currently being performed.


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