Perceived transmissibility of STIs: lack of differentiation between HIV and chlamydia

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as HIV and chlamydia, differ widely in their transmissibility. The estimated probability of HIV transmission from an infected heterosexual man to a woman in one act of unprotected vaginal intercourse is 0.1%, whereas the same probability for chlamydia is 35%.

This research examines college students’ knowledge about the per act transmission probabilities for HIV and chlamydia. Previous studies reported median perceived transmission probabilities of 50% and 33.4% for HIV for one act of unprotected receptive vaginal intercourse with an infected man. These findings were interpreted as demonstrating “badly overestimated per act transmission probabilities” (Pinkerton et al. p 19). However, the distributions of the estimates were not provided. If estimates are widely dispersed across the entire probability range from 0% to 100%, interpretations of averages should be incorporated into sexual health programmes in order to make people more aware of STIs that are considerably easier to contract than HIV.

No age or sex differences were found. Only 3.9% and 5.6% of the estimates for HIV and chlamydia, respectively, come close to the correct probabilities if “correct” is defined as smaller than 0.5% for HIV and between 30% and 40% for chlamydia. In all, 34.8% of the participants falsely estimate that chlamydia has a lower transmission probability than HIV. 39.5% correctly estimate that chlamydia has a higher transmission probability than HIV, and 25.8% provide exactly the same percentage estimate for both STIs.

The data show that a large majority of college students clearly lacks knowledge of the transmission probabilities of HIV and chlamydia and does not know that chlamydia is more infectious than HIV. The report of statistical averages of the perceived transmissibility and their interpretation as indicating a systematic overestimation bias may be unfounded. The results highlight the importance of inspecting response distributions and restraining from reporting statistical averages when distributions are widely dispersed. Furthermore, they highlight that information about transmission probabilities should be incorporated into sexual health programmes in order to make people more aware of STIs that are considerably easier to contract than HIV.

Acknowledgements

The research was conducted with support from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRG, 410-2002-09) and a New Opportunities Fund from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI, 4015) to Barbel Knäuper. The data collection was funded by a grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC, 410-2002-09) and a New Opportunities Fund from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI, 4015) to Barbel Knäuper. The study was jointly conceptualised and designed by BK and RK; data were collected by RK, with the data collection, as well as Irv Binik and Sandi Byers for helpful comments on an earlier version of the manuscript. The reported research was funded by a grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRG, 410-2002-09) and a New Opportunities Fund from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI, 4015) to Barbel Knäuper. The study was jointly conceptualised and designed by BK and RK; data were collected by RK, with the data collection, as well as Irv Binik and Sandi Byers for helpful comments on an earlier version of the manuscript.

Contributors

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B Knäuper, R Kornik
McGill University, Montreal, Canada

References


A new method for extended trichomonad storage

With the introduction of the InPouch test for Trichomonas vaginalis, T gallinae, and T foetus, it was desirable to have a procedure available for maintaining extended culture viability. The three trichomonads are viable after 8 days by subculture in the InPouch at 33°C. Extended viable storage of these three trichomonads is the subject of this letter.

We have evaluated various procedures involving freezing 24 hour InPouch cultures at ~70°C. We now report a procedure that has demonstrated storage of viable trichomonad cultures for more than 2 years.

The freshly subcultured trichomonads are incubated at 35°C for 24 hours, which should produce a viable count of approximately 1.0 × 10^7/ml. It is important to note that subsequent subcultures will require an adequate nutrient available for growth in the pouch. Then 0.1 ml of pure sterile glycerol is added to the medium in the pouch and thoroughly mixed employing the shoe-shine technique. It is important to immediately place the pouch in a ~70°C freezer.

After freezing most of the trichomonads in the pouch are non-viable, but successful subculture is routinely achieved upon thawing. When the pouch is removed from the freezer, it should be immediately placed in an incubator at 35–37°C. After 3 days a few viable trichomonads will be observed, and after 4 days it may be subcultured.

This procedure has been effective for T vaginalis, T gallinae, and T foetus.

K A Borchardt
CBLS, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA, USA

J H Hall
BioMed Diagnostics, Inc, San Jose, CA, USA
PostScript

Reference


‘Water can’ penis caused by tuberculosis

Tuberculosis of the penis is a very rare condition, clinically manifesting as primary or secondary tuberculosis or tuberculous.

Penile involvement secondary to urethral tuberculosis is rare and its presentation with perirectal fistulas leading to ‘water can’ penis is unknown. We report this rather intriguing condition in a patient.

A 40 year old male agricultural labourer presented with a 1 year history of purulent discharge per urethra with multiple discharging sinuses on the tip of the penis. The patient was asymptomatic about a year ago, when he developed multiple nodules on the glans penis that ulcerated to discharge purulent material. These nodules became persistent sinuses and discharged pus. Within a few weeks, he started passing urine through these sinuses in the glans penis. He also experienced difficulty in micition but it was not associated with pain or strangury.

The patient had no systemic complaints. He was married with two children and had no history of extramarital contact or genital ulcers.

On physical examination, the penis shape was like a saxophone. The prepuce and glans penis were oedematous and indurated. The glans penis had multiple sinuses around the urethral meatus (fig 1). On squeezing the penis, pus was expressed from the meatus and the sinuses. The glans penis also showed areas of depigmentation (vitiligo). The distal part of the shaft of the penis showed induration involving corpora cavernosa whereas the proximal part was devoid of any lesion. The testes, bilateral epididymis, and scrotum were normal.

The vas deferens was normal on palpation. The prostate was normal on rectal examination.

The routine haemogram revealed an elevated erythrocyte sedimentation rate of 100 mm in the first hour. His liver and renal functions were normal. The discharge smear stained with Gram stain and Ziehl-Neelsen stain. The Gram stained smear revealed numerous pus cells and acid fast stain showed abundant acid fast bacilli. Culture for Mycobacterium tuberculosis grew contaminants. A roentgenogram of the chest and penis was unremarkable. An intravenous pyelogram was normal. Voiding cystourethrography revealed glandular urethral stricture with urethrococcutaneous fistula.

Ultrasonography of abdomen and prostate smears, the diagnosis of urethral tuberculosis. The patient showed marked improvement after 4 weeks of treatment.

The patient tolerated antituberculous treatment comprising isoniazid 300 mg, rifampicin 600 mg, pyrazinamide 1500 mg, and ethambutol 800 mg per day. The patient was started on antituberculous treatment comprising isoniazid 300 mg, rifampicin 600 mg, pyrazinamide 1500 mg, and ethambutol 800 mg per day.

The patient showed marked improvement after 4 weeks of treatment. The sinuses closed and discharge ceased. Patient was referred to urology for management of stricture, which was planned after the anti-tuberculous treatment.

Based on these clinical features, positive Mantoux test and acid fast bacilli in the urine, the diagnosis of urethral tuberculosis was made. The patient was started on antituberculous treatment comprising isoniazid 300 mg, rifampicin 600 mg, pyrazinamide 1500 mg, and ethambutol 800 mg per day.

The patient showed marked improvement after 4 weeks of treatment. The sinuses closed and discharge ceased. Patient was referred to urology for management of stricture, which was planned after the anti-tuberculous treatment.

The patient tolerated antituberculous treatment and completed 9 months of treatment with remarkable recovery in the swelling of the penis.

Genital involvement occurs in 50% of male patients with urogenital tuberculosis. Penile tuberculosis is rare with less than 1% of patients having penile involvement.1 Tuberculosis of the penis usually presents as ulcers, tubercular cavernitis, or nodules. In most cases, the lesion appears as a superficial, solitary, painless ulcer on the glans penis. It can be clinically indistinguishable from malignant disease.2 Rarely, lesions may persist as solid nodule or cavernitis with ulceration.1,3 Papulonecrotic tuberculide may also present as an ulcer on the penis.1 Penile involvement may occur secondary to co-existing urinary tract tuberculosis. The transmission occurs secondary to bacilluria in these patients. Infection of the penis may occur by direct contact at the time of intercourse with a partner having urogenital tuberculosis.4

Tuberculosis of male urethra is an uncommon condition and presents as urethral strictures, perirectal abcesses, or fistula formation. Fistulas can occur in the perineum leading on to “water can” perineum. Similar occurrence of fistulas in penis can be aptly designated as “water can” penis. In our case, penile involvement occurred secondary to urethral tuberculosis. Such involvement of the penis by tuberculosis is unique and not reported in the literature. “Water can penis” is also known to occur with gonorrhea but our patient had a negative urethral smear for Gram negative diplococci and had features suggestive of urethral tuberculosis.

Further, the strictures, fistulas, and lymphoedema had led to “saxophone” deformity of the penis. Such deformity is well known with lymphogranuloma venerium, but is unknown in tuberculosis.

K Karthikeyan, D M Thappa, K N Shivaswamy
Dermatology and STD Department, JIPMER, Pondicherry - 605006, India
Correspondence to: Professor D M Thappa, Dermatology and STD Department, JIPMER, Pondicherry - 605006, India; dmthappa@jipmer.edu

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References


South Asians with HIV in London: is it time to rethink sexual health service delivery to meet the needs of heterosexual ethnic minorities?

Recent conservative estimates suggest that at the end of 2002, 4.8 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in South Asia including 4.58 million in India.1 In the United Kingdom there are estimated to be 1.5 million people of south Asian ethnicity. While the National Strategy for Sexual Health aims to improve health care in those who have HIV through earlier diagnosis,2 studies have shown that that other ethnic minority groups present with advanced disease and not through routine genitourinary medicine (GUM) screening.3 We studied the case notes of all adults self defining as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Sri Lankan ethnicity diagnosed HIV positive from
January 1985 to December 2002 attending four HIV treatment centres in London. Information was collected on demography, mode of first presentation, and clinical stage of HIV infection.

In all, 117 patients were identified, 30 women and 87 men. The number of new diagnoses among south Asians increased by more than threefold over the period 1996 to 2002 compared to earlier years (25 diagnoses before 1996, 90 diagnosed from 1996–2002 representing one in three of all HIV positive south Asians reported in this time period. Despite the fact that the majority of these were not reported through routine GUM screening the median CD4 count at presentation of heterosexual and homosexual men was consistent with national trends.

Failure to maintain patient access to GUM clinics

We read with interest the article published by Cassell et al. on the maintenance of patient access to genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics following a switch to an appointment based system. Their data show no significant change in the age, ethnic mix, symptom status, and disease mix following the change to appointments. In addition, such a system of 35% prebooked appointments produced an increase in the number of patients seen over that time.

A new appointment based system was introduced at the John Hunter genitourinary medicine clinic at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital in October 2001. This comprised 80% of appointments which were prebooked with a further 20% allocated on the day following triage by a nurse. All patients with symptoms were seen on the day of presentation.

We have analysed the results from two 3 month periods, taken immediately before the change and 3 months after the introduction of an appointment based system. The total number of patients and sex ratio seen

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for testing</th>
<th>Heterosexual men (n = 45)</th>
<th>Homosexual men (n = 36)</th>
<th>Heterosexual women (n = 27)</th>
<th>Other risk groups (n = 9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible relationship</td>
<td>16 (36%)</td>
<td>6 (16%)</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median CD4 cell count</td>
<td>178 (3–1023)</td>
<td>381 (4–810)</td>
<td>377 (10–1,104)</td>
<td>151 (50–795)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median HIV viral load copies/ml (range)</td>
<td>24 500 (50–1 000 000)</td>
<td>24 636 (425–3 000 000)</td>
<td>7822 (173–489 184)</td>
<td>12 870 (6676–57 530)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known HIV+ sexual partner</td>
<td>27 (60%)</td>
<td>11 (31%)</td>
<td>7 (26%)</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine screen for sexually transmitted infections</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>12 (44%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient request</td>
<td>7 (15%)</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child positive</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (11%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurane/visa purposes</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antenatal screening</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (34%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Failed to maintain patient access to GUM clinics

We read with interest the article published by Cassell et al. on the maintenance of patient access to genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics following a switch to an appointment based system. Their data show no significant change in the age, ethnic mix, symptom status, and disease mix following the change to appointments. In addition, such a system of 35% prebooked appointments produced an increase in the number of patients seen over that time.

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### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>117 Jan–Sept 2001</th>
<th>11345 Jan–Sept 2002</th>
<th>3.2 (2.8 to 3.5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative drop (%)</td>
<td>(95% CI)</td>
<td>Total no of patients attending</td>
<td>Patients new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5191 (44.3)</td>
<td>4669 (41.2)</td>
<td>11714</td>
<td>3.2 (2.8 to 3.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2  Details of STIs diagnosed in men and women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>37 (0.5)</td>
<td>53 (0.8)</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>3 (0.1)</td>
<td>0.121*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>262 (3.8)</td>
<td>190 (2.9)</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>41 (0.9)</td>
<td>35 (0.7)</td>
<td>0.552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4a/C4c</td>
<td>244 (3.5)</td>
<td>179 (2.7)</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>187 (3.9)</td>
<td>199 (4.2)</td>
<td>0.399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4h</td>
<td>683 (9.9)</td>
<td>479 (7.2)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C10a</td>
<td>89 (1.3)</td>
<td>55 (0.8)</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>111 (2.3)</td>
<td>80 (1.7)</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C11a</td>
<td>264 (3.8)</td>
<td>254 (3.8)</td>
<td>0.998</td>
<td>147 (3.1)</td>
<td>164 (3.5)</td>
<td>0.239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total diagnosed with an STI at this episode</td>
<td>1579 (22.8)</td>
<td>1210 (18.2)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>486 (10.1)</td>
<td>481 (10.3)</td>
<td>0.849</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Value using χ² test with Yates’s correction.

(A1) Primary diagnosis of syphilis; (B1) gonorrhoea; (C4a, C4c) uncomplicated chlamydia; (C4h) non-gonococcal urethritis; (C10a) first attack of genital herpes; (C11a) anogenital warts.

Prevalence of HSV-1/HSV-2 antibodies in HIV seropositive patients in Coventry, United Kingdom

The seroprevalence of herpes simplex virus (HSV) antibody among HIV patients within the United Kingdom is unknown. We therefore conducted a HSV seroprevalence study in HIV patients attending our genitourinary medicine clinic from January 2000 to December 2001. Our previous study revealed an overall prevalence of HSV-1 (60%), HSV-2 (20%), and both HSV-1 and HSV-2 (12%) among male and female genitourinary medicine clinic attendees who were either HIV negative or whose HIV status was unknown.

Serum samples from 96 consecutive ethnically diverse HIV patients were collected during routine investigations, and tested for HSV type specific antibodies by monolocal antibody blocking enzyme linked immunosay. Out of 96 patients, two HSV-1 and three HSV-2 antibody test results were equivocal in four individuals. These were excluded from the analysis and results are presented here for 92 patients.

There were 56 men and 36 women in the study: 46 (50%) were white, 43 (47%) black African, and three were from other ethnic groups. All the black Africans were heterosexuals and 71% of men were homosexuals. The median age was 35 years (range 21–80).

HSV-1 seroprevalence was 86% among men and 97% among women (p = 0.14). HSV-2 seroprevalence was 50% among men whereas it was 94% among women (p = 0.0001). There was no statistically significant difference between the seroprevalence of HSV-1 between white and black people. However, seroprevalence of HSV-2 and both serotypes was significantly higher among black than among white people.

This study shows very high seroprevalence of HSV-1 (90%), HSV-2 (67%), and both HSV-1 and HSV-2 (64%) among our HIV positive cohort in Coventry. The high prevalence of HSV-2 in women is possibly because most of them were black and acquired HIV through sex. These findings may have important public health implications as the high rate of HSV-2 is therefore likely to act as a cofactor in HIV transmission.

References


Effective Sexual Health Interventions: Issues In Experimental Evaluation


HIV spreads more every day and there are epidemics of other STIs in both the developed and developing world at least in part because the fear of HIV appears to be receding in the population. Our current strategies to contain these problems are meeting with limited success and treatment of people who are already infected, important though that is in controlling bacterial infections, is much less effective with continuing viral infections. There is an urgent need to develop and to test better
methods of helping people to reduce their risky sexual behaviour. This book is excellent, brief, fairly comprehensive, and very readable. Its focus is designing studies on the effectiveness of sexual health interventions. If we are to get anywhere in improving behavioural interventions it is essential that what is done is carefully evaluated.

The first three chapters of the book are concerned with methodology, particularly whether randomised controlled (RCTs) trials are an appropriate method for evaluating interventions in this area. While this section of the book is well argued on all sides it doesn’t really break any new ground. The strengths and weaknesses of RCTs in behaviour change are pretty much what they are in any other area of medicine. Methodologies don’t exist as stand alone phenomena, whether an RCT or some other methodology is appropriate depends simply on what question one is seeking to answer.

The second section of the book covers models of behaviour change and the choice of design and outcome measures. It is clear that one of the main problems in intervening in sexual health is the poor quality of the available psychological models and our real lack of understanding about why people behave as they do. Without understanding why people behave as they do it is difficult to help them to change. It is interesting that models of health behaviour never seem to get discarded, even the ones that are known to be weak. There are particularly strong chapters on cluster randomisation, an approach which probably gives rise to more inappropriate phenomena, whether an RCT or some other methodology is appropriate depends simply on what question one is seeking to answer.

The book ends by looking at generalisability in its broadest sense. Generalisability is an area that tends to get overlooked. Even a highly successful behaviour change programme would be of no use in developing countries if it was labour intensive and dependent on highly skilled staff for its delivery. I would recommend this book to anyone planning a trial or simply seeking to understand the existing literature. I would however caution that to make sense of it you will have to look at some of the available reviews of the behaviour change literature since the book assumes some knowledge, or willingness to acquire knowledge, of these.

J Green
St Mary’s and Imperial College Hospital, London, UK; mail@john-green.com

NOTICES

Australasian Sexual Health Conference 2004: Behind the Mask
This conference will be held at the Adelaide Convention Centre, South Australia, on 31 March to 3 April 2004. For further details please contact Dart Associates (tel +61 2 9418 9396/97; email dartconv@mpx.com.au; and website http://www.acshp.org.au).

8th European Society of Contraception Congress
The 8th European Society of Contraception Congress will be held from 23–26 June 2004 in Edinburgh, Scotland, UK. For further details please contact ESC Central Office, c/o Orga-Med Congress Office, Essenestraat 77, B-1740 Ternat, Belgium (tel: +32 2 582 08 52; fax: +32 2 582 55 15; email: orgamed.am@pandora.be; and website: http://www.contraception-esc.com/edinburg.htm).

CORRECTIONS


The authors of a letter in the December issue of STI (Dave SS, Johnson AM, Fenton KA, Mercer CH, Erens B, Wellings K. Male circumcision in Britain: findings from a national probability sample survey. Sex Transm Infect 2003;79:499–500) were listed in the wrong order. The correct author list should be as follows: Dave SS, Fenton KA, Mercer CH, Erens B, Wellings K, Johnson AM.

In the corresponding author’s address of a letter published in the December issue (Bhatia R, Prabhakar S, Shedde D, et al. Coexistent cranial tuberculomas and tuberculosis of the cervix in a postmenopausal woman. Sex Transm Infect 2003;79:496–7) All India Institute of Medical Sciences was incorrectly printed as AU India Institute of Medical Sciences.