HIV EXPOSURE INCIDENTS
Real Behaviour should inform the Design of Learning Opportunities

BACKGROUND

The prevalence of HIV infection in hospital patients in South Africa is at least 46%. Medical students of the University of Pretoria are exposed to patients presenting with AIDS related illnesses on a daily basis. Although students learn and practice the standard precautions for prevention of transmission of HIV in their second year, data from exposure incidents showed that they did not consistently practice these precautions in their subsequent clinical work.

The School of Medicine asked the Department of Family Medicine to set up a protocol and take charge of the care of students presenting with an exposure incident. An audit was done on the reported HIV exposure incidents from 2004 to 2008. Examination of the results allowed us to reflect on the possible causes of the reported student behavior and to propose changes to the training process.

RESULTS OF AUDIT

- 195 incidents were reported over the 4 year period.
- 64% were needle stick injuries that occurred during the process of intravenous cannulation (43/125) or venepuncture (41/125).
- Of the reported splash incidents most occurred during surgery (20/70), followed by suturing (14/70) and IV cannulation (12/70).
- Most incidents involved students in their last two years of their 6 years of undergraduate training.
- 61 students were prescribed dual therapy (Combivir - 3TC & AZT) for postexposure prophylaxis.
- 6 students required triple therapy (3TC, AZT & Kaletra or Indinavir).

CONCLUSION

- Analysis of students' behaviour in the clinical situation can be used to improve learning opportunities.
- Skills lab training needs to simulate clinical reality as closely as possible.
- The entire skill from preparation to clearing up should be practiced.
- Training should use the same equipment as will be available in the wards.
- The assessment of competence should occur immediately prior to the clinical experience in which the skill will be used.

Improved training should reduce the number of incidents. This will be measured over the next 4 years.

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