



KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE ABOUT HIV INFECTION AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS AT GOVERNMENT GENERAL HOSPITAL, KURNOOL, AP – PROSPECTIVE OBSERVATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE BASED STUDY

Dermatology

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ABSTRACT

Aim And Objective: To assess the knowledge and attitudes of medical students towards patients suffering with HIV/AIDS. To determine if students felt adequately prepared to deal with medical and psychological aspects of HIV/AIDS. **Methodology:** The study was conducted in a questionnaire-based pattern at Government Medical College, Kurnool, including MBBS students of all the semesters. A structured questionnaire was distributed to all the medical students of each year. The questionnaires regarding knowledge were focused on various methods of transmission, high risk behaviours and preventive measures. Attitude towards HIV/AIDS patients, sexual behaviours, condom usage, sex education and resource allocation for HIV/AIDS patients were assessed. **Results:** A change in the knowledge from 1st to 4th year was seen in the following aspects: knowledge regarding vertical transmission (78% to 93.3%), transmission through Breast feeding (31.9% to 85.3%), tuberculosis as the most common opportunistic infection in HIV/AIDS (26.9% to 70%), correct time of initiation of PEP (5% to 46.7%), facility for getting HIV test done confidentially (0.6% to 42.7%). An increasing trend in the negative attitude towards HIV patients was seen from 1st to 4th year when it came to right to refuse surgical treatment to HIV patient (40% to 56%) and an increasing trend in the favourable response towards HIV patients were seen from 1st year to 4th year when it came to their opinion whether HIV patients can be kept in general Ward (57.5% to 78%). **Conclusions:** From the above study we conclude that the knowledge level on HIV/AIDS improved based on year of study. Discriminatory attitude towards HIV patients still persisted among students of all the years.

KEYWORDS

Human immunodeficiency virus, Health care professionals, Medical students

INTRODUCTION

Human immunodeficiency viral infection is a major public health challenge. About 2.24 million persons are living with HIV in India. On the Asian sub-continent, an estimated 4.87 million people were living with HIV in 2009¹. Health education, including Information Education & Communication (IEC) and attitude and knowledge about the disease are the key strategies for controlling this epidemic. Since HIV/AIDS cases are continuously increasing in the developing countries like India, healthcare professionals have to be well trained, so that they can play a crucial role in controlling this pandemic. Even though it is well known that healthcare professionals play a definitive role in prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, less attention is given to assess knowledge and attitude of the healthcare professionals. Few studies have reported stigma & discrimination by healthcare professionals while treating HIV- positive patients. Results of a study revealed that about one sixth of HIV- positive patients were denied treatment¹. Another study identified serious knowledge gaps among medical professionals leading to refusal of treatment to patients suffering with HIV². There were reports of reluctance by dentists in treating patients, including refusal to treat³. In another study, dentists reported fear of getting infected, non- cooperation from support staff and perceived-lack of clinical skills as barriers to treating HIV positives⁴. A study on MBBS students revealed that 90% students shown certain misconceptions as potential source for HIV testing for patients before admission, 60% were not willing for mouth-to- mouth resuscitation and 40% were unwilling to assist in surgical procedures on HIV/AIDS patients⁵. Students from medical, dental and allied health professions are to be sensitized on the knowledge pertaining to HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention. It is also necessary that these future healthcare workers should inculcate healthy attitude towards persons living with HIV/AIDS. However, there are limited studies which have explored knowledge and attitudes of healthcare students pertaining to HIV/AIDS. Keeping this in view, a study was conducted to assess the knowledge & attitudes related to HIV/AIDS among students of medical and allied health sciences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was a questionnaire-based study conducted among the medical students from 2022 April to 2023 April at the Government Medical College, Kurnool. A detailed structured questionnaire was distributed to all the medical students from first year to fourth year of

MBBS course after explaining the aims of the study and obtaining informed consent from them. All participants were clearly advised that participation in this survey was voluntary. The students were given 1 hour to respond to the questionnaires. Questions about modes of transmission, treatment, risk of acquiring HIV infection (occupational risk), sources of information and whether they had received any training on HIV/AIDS or not. Responses were recorded in terms of “true”, “false” or “don’t know”. The attitude scale consisted of questions about students’ attitude; such as willingness to treat HIV-positive persons, ethics while treating the HIV-positive patients, adoption of precautionary measures (using protective attires) and training needs pertaining to HIV/AIDS.

RESULTS

A total of 390 students were included in the study, 100 first year, 97 second year, 95 third year and 98 fourth year students. A change in the knowledge from 1st to 4th year was seen in the following aspects: knowledge regarding vertical transmission (78% to 93.3%), transmission through Breast feeding (31.9% to 85.3%), tuberculosis as the most common opportunistic infection in HIV/AIDS (26.9% to 70%), correct time of initiation of post exposure prophylaxis (5% to 46.7%), facility for getting HIV test done confidentially (0.6% to 42.7%). An increasing trend in the negative attitude towards HIV patients was seen from 1st to 4th year when it came to right to refuse surgical treatment ton HIV patient (40% to 56%). An increasing trend in the favourable response towards HIV patients were seen from 1st year to 4th year when it came to their opinion whether HIV patients can be kept in general Ward (57.5% to 78%).

DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the medical students of 19-25 years of age. The knowledge and attitudes of this population play a major role in the health care system of a country as they are the future health care providers who would be responsible for imparting their knowledge and educating the public regarding HIV/AIDS information, modes of disease transmission, high risk sexual behaviours as well as effective preventive measures. In this study, all the respondents recognized the major routes of transmission of HIV/AIDS infection such as transfusion of infected blood and blood products, unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person. The great majority also knew that HIV is not transmitted by sharing utensils, close physical contact like

hugging, handshaking and contact through saliva or sweat. Media has a huge impact in raising basic awareness on various health issues including HIV/AIDS. Regarding precautionary measures, the overall knowledge of all the participants was found to be very low, more than 50% of the participants are unaware of the fact that latex gloves could provide protection against accidental exposure to HIV infection. Because of this knowledge gap, healthcare professionals might refrain from using protective measures while handling HIV cases and they may also avoid treating HIV patients.

CONCLUSION

The overall knowledge among the medical students was adequate except for a few of the students with some misconceptions. There is a strong need for motivation of HIV related education right from the beginning of medical curriculum so as to remove misconceptions among students. Another Area that needs to be addressed is the attitude of students towards people living with HIV. There is a need for medical colleges to create an environment that is conducive to the development of appropriate Student attitude towards HIV. Further such studies must be conducted involving all branches of health Care so as to prepare health science students to handle HIV/AIDS patients better and also contribute to health education in society.

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