ANAL CANCER SCREENING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: A NATIONAL SURVEY OF PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES AMONG SEXUAL HEALTH CLINICS

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BACKGROUND:
- HPV-associated anal cancer remains a rare disease, however during the last decade there has been a significant increase in the incidence of anal cancer among high risk groups such as those with infected with HIV.
- In high risk populations screening for anal intraepithelial neoplasia (AIN) could potentially prevent excess morbidity and mortality from HPV-associated anal cancer.
- To date there has been no national surveys on anal cancer screening knowledge, attitudes and practices among Sexual Health Clinics in the UK.

AIM:
- The aim of this study was to assess the awareness and practices regarding anal cancer screening in a sample of Sexual Health Clinics in the United Kingdom.

METHODS:
- A web-based survey was sent to the Lead Consultants of 116 sexual health clinics from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland between August and December 2012.
- The survey consisted of 22 questions evaluating anal cancer screening knowledge, perceptions and practices.
- Survey data was collected and analysed using a web-based data collection service (Survey Monkey™).

RESULTS (1):
- 73 (62%) clinics responded to the survey, of which 69 (95%) provide care for HIV infected individuals.
- From the clinics that provide care for HIV-infected individuals, 52(72%) have a HIV cohort of more than 100 patients (range= 50 to >1000), with a proportion of men that have sex with men (MSM) of 46% (range 1 to 82%).
- Regarding knowledge of anal cancer risk factors, 67(96%) clinics responded that they are aware of the increased risk of HPV-associated anal cancer in HIV-infected individuals, particularly HIV-infected MSM.

RESULTS (2):
- Only 4(5%) clinics routinely offer anal cancer screening for HIV-positive individuals. All 4(100%) clinics screen HIV-infected MSM.
- 1 of those 4 clinics also screens HIV-positive heterosexuals with history of multicentric HPV disease and HIV-negative MSM.
- While all 4 clinics use DARE and anal cytology for routine screening, only 3 clinics have a dedicated high resolution anoscopy clinic.
- From the 4 clinics that offer anal cancer screening, 3 clinics routinely recommend anal cancer screening at least once a year, while 1 clinic recommends screening every six months.
- In clinics were anal cancer screening was not available (n=69), patients with abnormal DARE or anal cytology were mostly referred to colorectal surgery services (46%) for management.

CONCLUSION:
- Awareness of risk factors and screening methods for HPV-associated anal cancer among a sample of Sexual Health Clinics in the United Kingdom is high.
- Despite the increasing risk of HPV-associated anal cancer in high-risk groups such as those with HIV disease.

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