

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 **Figure 1**

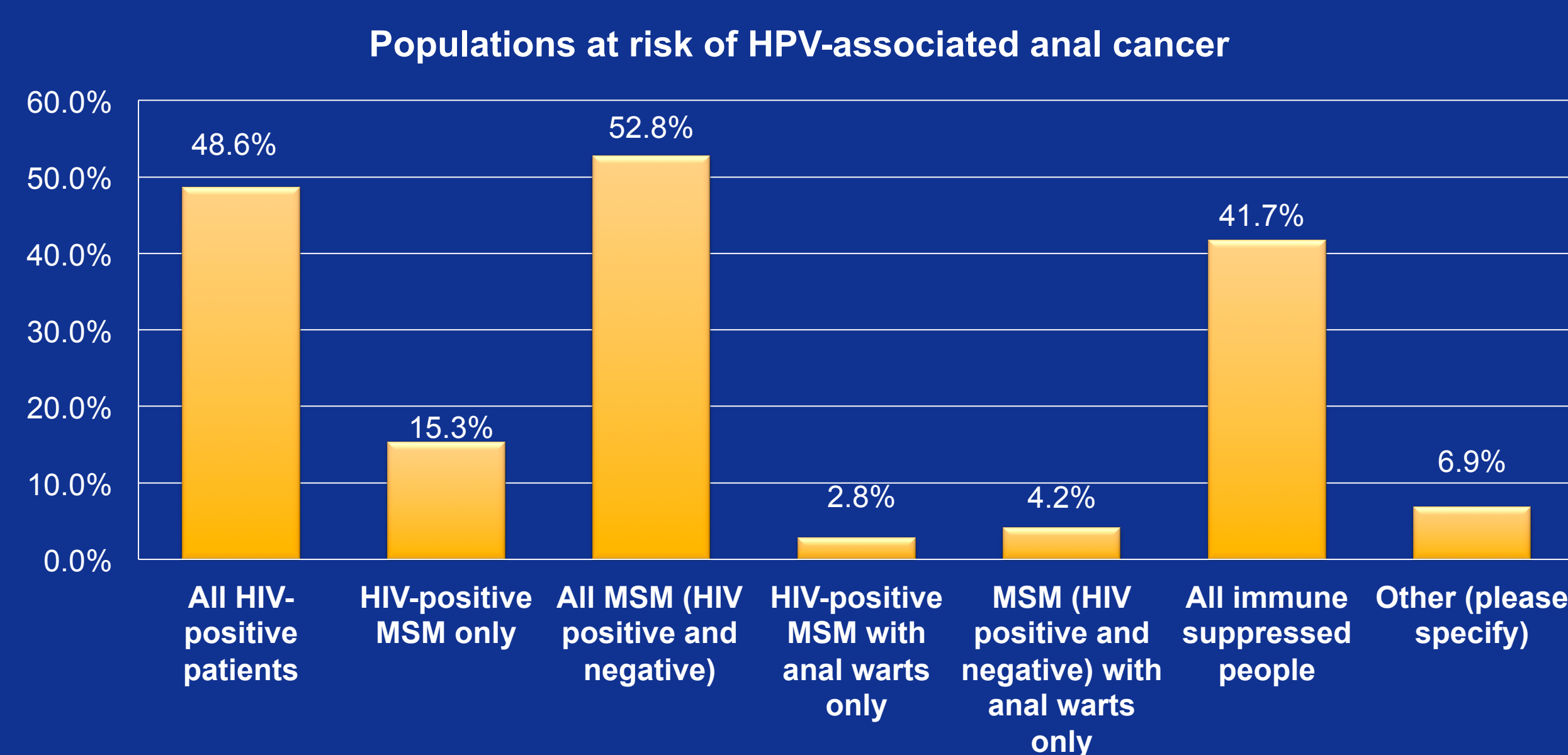
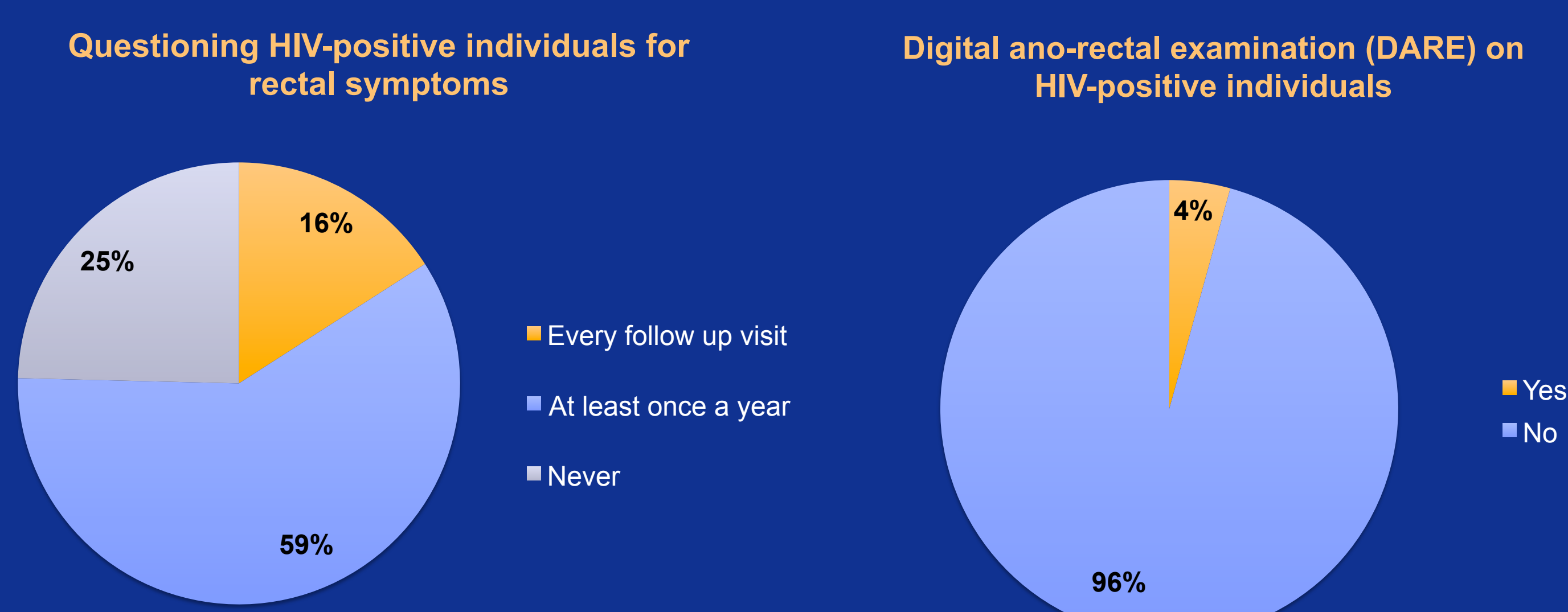


Figure 1. Knowledge on populations at risk of HPV associated anal cancer

- 41(59%) of clinics routinely ask HIV-infected individuals for rectal symptoms associated with anal cancer (rectal discomfort, rectal bleeding or tenesmus) at least once a year, however only 3 (4%) clinics responded that they perform digital rectal examination for anal cancer screening in HIV-infected individuals



RESULTS (2):

- Regarding screening methods for prevention of anal cancer, 64(92%) responded to have awareness of screening methods for the identification of pre-malignant anal lesions such as anal intraepithelial neoplasia (AIN). **Figure 2**

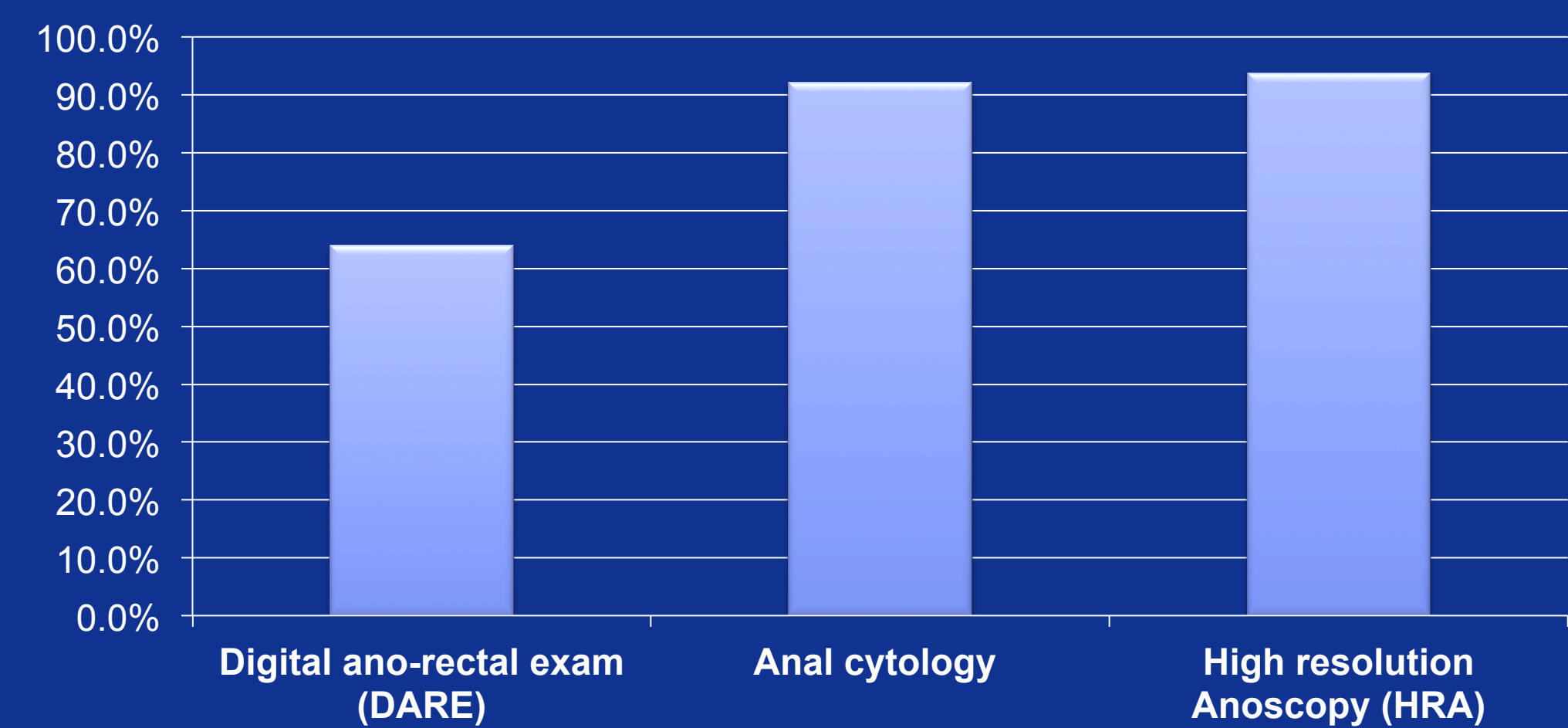


Figure 2. Knowledge on screening methods for anal cancer

- 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 where anal cancer screening was not available (n=69), patients with abnormal DARE or anal cytology were mostly referred to colorectal surgery services 46(66%) for management. **Figure 3**

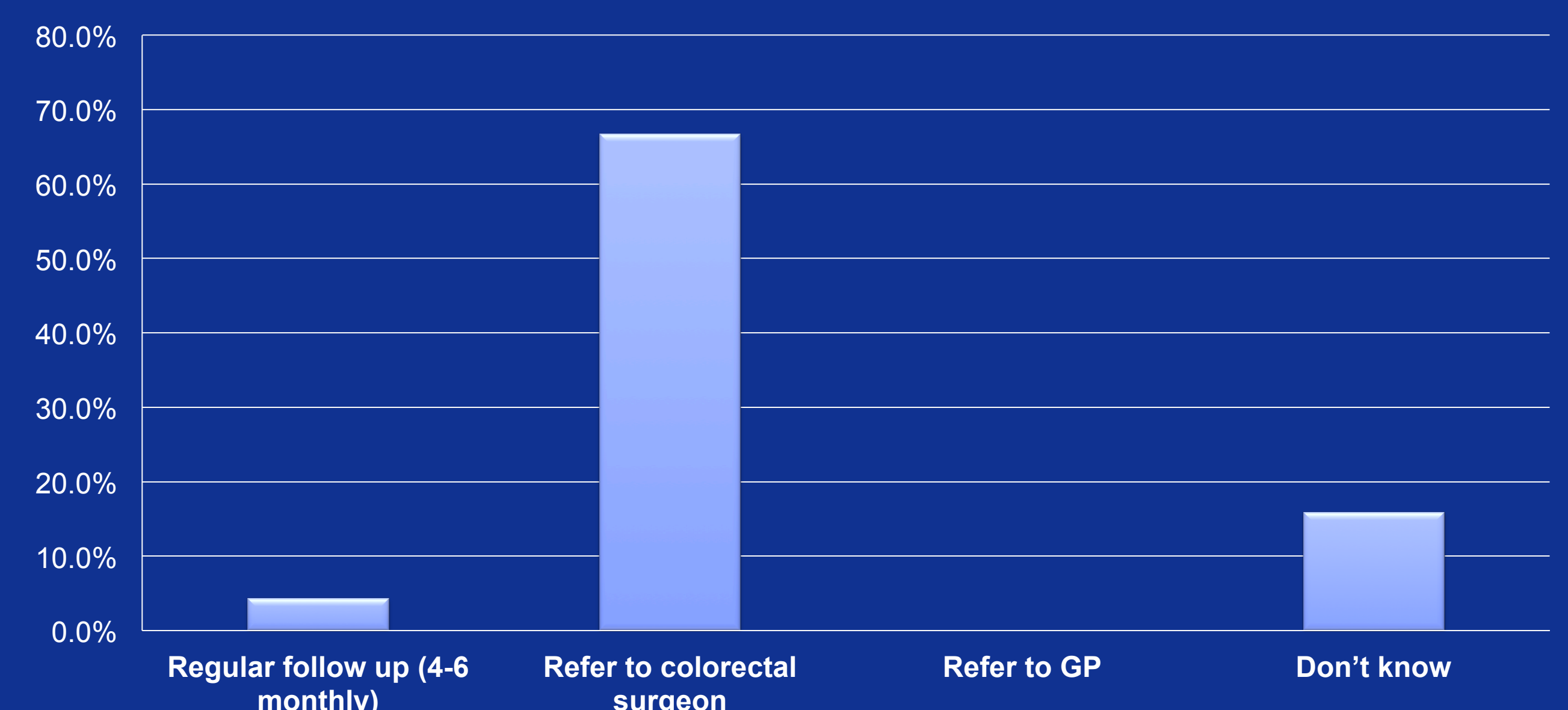


Figure 3. Management of patients with abnormal DARE or anal cytology in clinics without anal cancer screening services

- 15(21%) of clinics responding to the survey are planning to set up a screening service in the future, while other clinics are waiting for national guidelines
- Interestingly, 21(30%) of respondents do not consider screening for anal cancer to be effective in the prevention of HPV-associated anal cancer among high-risk groups such as those with HIV-disease

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 infection, only a minority of Sexual Health Clinics are offering anal cancer screening at present, although more clinics are planning to do so in the future.

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