



BHIVA Secretariat: Mediscript Ltd

1 Mountview Court · 310 Friern Barnet Lane · London N20 0LD

Tel: +44 (0)20 8369 5380 · Fax: +44 (0)20 8446 9194 · Email: bhiva@bhiva.org · Web: www.bhiva.org

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Dear Colleague

UK National Guidelines for HIV Testing 2008

During my term as Clinical Vice President at the Royal College of Physicians, we worked collaboratively with BHIVA, BIS and BASHH to co-produce the *Standards for HIV Clinical Care*, a major step to improving the standards of care for patients with HIV. It has been a pleasure to work with these specialist societies again, in the production of updated guidelines for HIV testing. Many clinicians in all specialties perceive HIV testing as difficult and think that special training and lengthy counselling are required. They may find it difficult to raise the possibility of an HIV test, and fear that exceptional and complex arrangements for confidentiality are necessary. They may avoid discussion about what is still seen as a stigmatising diagnosis, and so miss opportunities to make the diagnosis.

We know that highly active antiretroviral therapy has transformed the outlook for patients with HIV, with the majority remaining well on treatment, provided the diagnosis is made early. Yet we also know that the diagnosis is often made late, contributing substantially to morbidity and mortality, and that there are many thousands of patients undiagnosed in the UK, compromising their own health and increasing the risk of onward transmission of the virus.

The UK Chief Medical and Chief Nursing Officers have emphasised the importance of increasing the detection and diagnosis of HIV. We have to ensure that HIV testing is accepted as part of the routine management of establishing a differential diagnosis whenever and wherever it is clinically appropriate. HIV is one of the most important communicable diseases in the UK, and timely diagnosis is part of good clinical practice. These guidelines are intended to facilitate early diagnosis and reduce the levels of undiagnosed HIV. The Department of Health is undertaking a range of initiatives to increase the rates of diagnosis and to de-stigmatise HIV, and these guidelines have coincided with production of a booklet from the Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health (MedFASH) to raise awareness of HIV amongst non-HIV specialists, and to reduce barriers to testing. BHIVA, BIS and BASHH have worked together with MedFASH to ensure that these two pieces of work complement each other, and I have been delighted to be part of that collaboration.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mary Armitage
Immediate Past Clinical Vice President, Royal College of Physicians (RCP)

Enc: Copy of *UK National Guidelines for HIV Testing 2008*