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The Impact of Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) on the Social Adaptation of Drug Users: Results of an Anonymous Survey in Patients at the St. Petersburg City AIDS Center

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BACKGROUND

Initiation of HAART can motivate patients to reassess their lifestyles. The objective of this study conducted at the St. Petersburg City AIDS Center in 2011 was to measure the impact of HAART on the social adaptation of HIV-infected drug users, primarily people who use injection drugs.

METHODS

The survey was based on an anonymous questionnaire. Patients assessed their health, past and current drug and/or alcohol use, and social wellbeing. Other survey questions focused on issues such as employment, welfare, and marital status.

The subset of respondents was selected from all adult HAART patients who visited the St. Petersburg City AIDS Center during an 8-week period. Among 3,350 patients receiving HAART, the sampling size for the study was 345. Of the 349 patients interviewed, 185 patients reported drug use in the past and were selected for the study.

This project was implemented by the American International Health Alliance's HIV/AIDS Twinning Center with support from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Russia.

RESULTS

Only 16 (9%) patients reported current drug use and 27 (15%) reported alcohol use; 77 (42%) patients assessed their health as good and 89 (33%) noted improvement compared to the previous year. The survey also indicated that 103 (56%) patients were employed, 82 (44%) had average and higher incomes, and 103 (56%) were married or lived in domestic partnerships. There was a correlation between certain indicators of social adaptation and duration of HAART.

There were also differences between males and females as depicted in Tables 2, 3, and 4 at right.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates the positive impact of HAART on social adaptation in HIV-infected drug users. More patients became employed (46% — 63%) and their welfare improved with those reporting average and higher incomes increasing from 35% to 51%. Long-term partnerships and marriages stabilized with 41% compared to 62% of respondents reporting being married or in a domestic partnership.

It is noteworthy that the patients receiving HAART for a duration of 1-2 years show visible deterioration in variables compared to other groups. Timely social and psychological support for those patients is crucial to prevent HAART discontinuation and drug use relapse.

Table 1: Health and Social Indicators in Drug Users Living with HIV and Receiving HAART

Haart Duration	Currently Feel Well	Feel Better Than 12 Months Ago	Currently Using Drugs	Currently Using Alcohol	Employed	Average or Higher Income	Married or Domestic Partnership
1-6 Months (n=37)	38% (14/37)	51% (19/37)	3% (1/37)	8% (3/37)	46% (17/37)	35% (13/37)	41% (15/37)
< 1 Year (n=25)	44% (11/25)	68% (17/25)	4% (1/25)	12% (3/25)	60% (15/25)	56% 14/25	52% (13/25)
< 2 Years (n= 37)	38% (14/37)	41% (15/37)	14% (5/37)	19% (7/37)	49% (18/37)	32% (12/37)	57% (21/37)
> 2 Years (n=76)	43% (33/76)	43% (33/76)	11% (8/76)	18% (14/76)	63% (48/76)	51% (39/76)	62% (47/76)

Table 2: Differences in Employment and Income Levels

Haart Duration	Employment Status		Income Level	
	Male, Employed	Female, Employed	Male, Average or Higher Income	Female, Average or Higher Income
1-6 Months	44%	25%	40%	25%
< 1 Year	64%	7%	64%	50%
< 2 Years	41%	20%	35%	30%
> 2 Years	60%	44%	57%	46%

Table 3: Differences in Marriage or Domestic Partnership Status

Haart Duration	Marriage Or Domestic Partnership Status		Reproductive Activity	
	Male, Married or In a Domestic Partnership	Female, Married or In a Domestic Partnership	Male Reproductive Activity	Female Reproductive Activity
1-6 Months	36%	50%	72%	67%
< 1 Year	36%	64%	73%	79%
< 2 Years	53%	60%	76%	100%
> 2 Years	46%	76%	89%	85%

Table 4: Differences in Substance Use and Overall Well-being

Haart Duration	Male				Female			
	Currently Feel Well	Feel Better Than 12 Months Ago	Currently Using Drugs	Currently Using Alcohol	Currently Feel Well	Feel Better Than 12 Months Ago	Currently Using Drugs	Currently Using Alcohol
1-6 Months	80%	52%	4%	12%	83%	50%	0%	0%
< 1 Year	27%	73%	9%	18%	57%	64%	0%	7%
< 2 Years	53%	47%	12%	12%	25%	35%	10%	25%
> 2 Years	37%	51%	17%	26%	49%	37%	5%	12%

