

HIV/AIDS BASICS



**Training course for patients' associations
to improve communication with patients**

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Abstract. This booklet deals with basic clinical information on HIV/AIDS and is mainly addressed to patients' associations working within the CASA project. It provides general knowledge on HIV/AIDS to help associations in their communication activity with HIV patients. The book includes some information about CASA project and some lessons on HIV transmission and prevention, ART therapy and cotrimossazole, the importance of adherence, and some social aspects of living with HIV. The booklet is part of a series of training toolkits developed within the CASA project.

Key words: HIV/AIDS, communication, CASA project, training.

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For information on the CASA project, visit the website: www.casaproject.info



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Preface

Since the beginning of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the role of the community has been overwhelming important in fighting this once deadly disease.

In the first decade of the epidemic, the community stimulated researchers and clinicians, both from the public and the private sector, to reach the amazing therapeutic advantages which are able today, wherever it is available, to control the progression of the infection and save millions of lives.



In the second decade, from the Durban Conference (year 2000) onwards, the community has played an important advocacy role in the battle towards universal access to HIV treatment and care, both in rich countries and in resource limited settings and in fighting stigma and discrimination.

Finally, in the era of potent antiretroviral combinations (ART) the role of a very educated and knowledgeable community has been instrumental to support the patients in their journey through a life-long commitment to adherence.

This booklet contains a number of key messages, which the community - through an interactive peer-to-peer approach - may use to support retention in ART and reach the goal of HIV “full suppression”.

This latter objective, if obtained in a significant number of patients, may have a dramatic impact at the individual level, because it decreases mortality and morbidity, and at a public health level with a progressive global decrease of new HIV infections throughout the world.

Stefano Vella
Global Health Research Group, Istituto Superiore di Sanità



The Tigray Region, Ethiopia, where CASA project is working

About CASA project



Before starting the training on clinical aspects of HIV, it is important to have some information about the CASA project which is supporting this training activity.

CASA project aims to improve the quality of care of HIV/AIDS patients in Ethiopia through research and training activities.

The Tigray Health Bureau has full responsibility of the CASA project that is realized in collaboration with Mekelle University and the National Institute of Health in Italy.

In Italian, the word “CASA” means “home”, a word that fully represents the inner meaning of the project: a home for all of you who wish to share CASA objectives and contribute to improve the quality of care of HIV patients.

CASA project is based on two main pillars: operational research and training.

About CASA operational research. HIV infected patients are enrolled in different health facilities in the Tigray Region and they are followed up to provide evidence-based data on how the ART therapy works in a context of clinical practice.

About CASA training activity. Training within CASA project is mainly addressed to health workers and patients' associations having a direct influence on the project achievements. Training in communication and clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS will provide basic knowledge to contribute to improve adherence and retention to therapy.



The collaboration with patients' associations is particularly relevant to contribute to reach the CASA project objectives; in fact, we are convinced that that patients' associations will play an important role to develop a positive communication with HIV/AIDS patients and their families and contribute to improve their quality of life. Patients' associations are expected to contribute to trace HIV patients missing to follow up. The members of patients' associations will interact with

CASA case managers. Case managers will provide them the list of patients who did not show to the visit when it was due. The role of patients' association is to contact patients missing to follow up and report back to case managers why these patients did not show to the visit. This will be an opportunity to talk to patients and their families, share concerns, provide support and convince them to adhere to therapy. It is important for patients' associations to develop some communication skills and acquire basic information on the clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS to better perform their tasks.

That is why the CASA project team decided to produce some training booklets addressed to health workers and patients' associations working within the CASA project.

Up to now three booklets were produced:

- **CASA Toolkit 1**, dealing with **basic communication skills**
- **CASA Toolkit 2**, dealing with **HIV/AIDS basics**
- **CASA Toolkit 3**, dealing with **clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS**.



These booklets were written on the basis of our personal experience within the health centres collaborating in the CASA project, in the Tigray Region. This booklet on HIV/AIDS basics was written when two Italian collaborating doctors, from Genoa University, were working in the health facilities involved in the project.

The booklets were originally written in English, and then they were translated in Tigrinya.

During the implementation of the training course, a local tutor of the CASA project team will assist the participants. When you complete the course a final test will take place to evaluate your knowledge on basic aspects of HIV/AIDS.

If you pass the final test, as we do hope, you will receive a certificate of accomplishment released by the Tigray Health Bureau.



Members of the CASA project team, from left: Paola De Castro, Eskedar Tadesse, Stefano Vella, Federica Magnè, Paola Tatarelli, Teshome Abegaz (Tigray, March 2015)

About this booklet

This booklet provides basic information on clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS. It is mainly addressed to patients' associations with the primary objective to help them to develop a positive and effective communication with HIV/AIDS patients and their families and explain in a clear and persuading way why it is important to regularly take drugs, according to medical prescriptions.

The structure of the book includes seven lessons on basic topics selected according to the most frequently asked questions or concerns of HIV patients including transmission and prevention, antiretroviral therapy (ART), adherence and information on drugs (ART and cotrimossazole), living with HIV/AIDS, gender differences in the approach to HIV.

For each topic we included some basic clinical information, expressed in short and clear sentences, followed by a possible dialogue on that topic, between a patient and a member of a patients' association. The dialogue is an example on how communication can be developed through an empathic approach which encourages a positive attitude towards the disease, pointing out the benefits of retention in care. Each dialogue is followed by two multiple choice questions which will help readers to memorize new concepts and facilitate the use of correct clinical information in a specific context.

We encourage discussion among the members of the patients' associations working within the CASA project. This will help to properly apply both communication skills and scientific knowledge on clinical aspects of HIV through an empathic approach towards HIV patients. In this way, patients' associations will contribute to reach the CASA project objectives in the best possible way.

As for the first toolkit in Communication, also this second toolkit has an appendix including a pre-text on basic clinical information to be administered before the training course. The results of the pre-test will be compared with those of the final test to evaluate progress after the training course. We also included some blank pages at the end of the booklet for you to take notes on important concepts you wish to remember, ideas you wish to discuss with your colleagues or with your tutor and suggestions for new topics. Remember that you can always ask questions to the training tutor or to CASA staff.

We do hope that this booklet will be useful to you, please do not hesitate to contact the CASA project team if you need further information. You can also write an e-mail to contact@casaproject.info.



Lesson 1. What is HIV, how it is transmitted and how it can be prevented

In this first lesson we will provide some basic concepts about HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), how it is transmitted and how it can be prevented.

We encourage you to carefully read the “basic information”, highlighted in green, and try to memorize all new concepts that you will learn.

It is extremely important for you to acquire basic information on the clinical aspects of HIV to be ready to provide HIV patients the most appropriate and correct information on the virus as well as on its transmission and prevention, whenever this information needed. It may be helpful to discuss these topics during the meetings of patients’ associations or with health officers.

This will contribute to make you fully aware of the implications of the disease and the important role you play to inform and support patients and contribute to achieve the CASA project objectives.



1.1. Basic information

- HIV is a **virus that damages patients' body**. It makes them not able to fight against other infections and diseases so they can even die.
- HIV is **not curable, but there are many medicines to control it**.
- HIV is mainly transmitted through **unprotected sex with an infected person**. It can also be transmitted by contact with the **blood** of a HIV-positive person, for example by sharing drug **needles**.
- HIV can be transmitted **from an infected woman to her baby** during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.
- HIV is **not spread through the air and the saliva**. So, it is not contagious by speaking, kissing, sharing cutlery and making all the usual daily life activities with an infected person.
- Sexual transmission of HIV is **preventable by using condom or abstinence** (not having sex). Moreover, taking regularly antiretroviral drugs strongly decrease the risk of HIV transmission to a non-infected partner. Anyway, **partners of HIV-positive people should regularly be tested**.
- **Blood transmission is preventable** by being careful on sharing razors, toothbrush and any other cutting instrument used for personal hygiene that may have your blood on it.

- **Mother-to-child transmission is preventable** by a regular intake of antiretroviral drugs by the mother during pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- An important way of HIV prevention is **education**, especially sexual education of the young people.
- People at risk of being infected (for example by unprotected sexual intercourse) should be educated on the importance of performing HIV test. Indeed, if someone knows to be HIV-positive, he/she can **protect himself/herself by starting ART** and can **prevent transmission to others**.
- Remember that using **condom protects also from other sexually-transmitted infections**, such as syphilis and hepatitis.
- **Start therapy as soon as you know that you are HIV positive**, do not wait to feel bad.

1.2. Communication with patients

In this section we will report a possible **situation** where a positive communication with patients can be established on the basis of newly acquired scientific knowledge on HIV, its transmission and prevention. The example of a possible **dialogue** is also reported soon after the situation.



A pregnant woman knew she was HIV positive during an ante-natal visit. She is worried about transmission of the infection to her infant and her family. You have to explain her how she can protect them from being infected.

Patient I knew about my HIV status some weeks ago during an ante-natal visit. I immediately started therapy but I am worried... Can I transmit the virus to my baby?

You Fortunately, ART decreases the possibility of HIV transmission to your baby, but it is very important that you take it regularly. Moreover, you will be followed during the pregnancy and, after delivery, the baby will start a treatment to further reduce the possibility of getting infected.



Patient Ok... and what about my husband and the other children? I am worried to be a danger for them.

You Don't worry. The main way of HIV transmission is unprotected sex, so you can protect your partner by using condom. HIV can also be transmitted by contact with infected blood, so you just have to be prudent in your daily life. In this way your relatives will be safe.

We invite you to think of other possible dialogues with HIV patients where you can help them to understand how HIV is transmitted and how prevent it.

1.3 Questions on Lesson 1

Now, you are invited to answer the questions below to be sure that you understood the contents of this lesson and that you are able to memorize them. Only one of the three answers below is correct. If you are not sure, please revise the lesson to learn more about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention.



1. Is HIV a curable infection?

- a. No, HIV is not curable, but you can control it and feel better.
- b. Yes, HIV is curable disease and is not transmittable
- c. Sometimes it is curable and not transmissible

2. One of the following is not a way of HIV transmission. Which one?

- a. Contact with infected blood.
- b. Contact with saliva of a HIV patient.
- c. Unprotected sex

3. Is HIV testing a method of prevention?

- a. No. HIV testing is not a method for prevention.
- b. Yes, because if you result positive, you can leave your family and live alone.
- c. Yes, because if you result positive you can take therapy, have protected sex and be careful in your daily life to protect others.

Lesson 2. Why starting antiretroviral therapy (ART)

In this lesson we will provide some basic clinical concepts that are important for you to know to better convince patients why starting ART.

We encourage you to memorize these concepts to be ready to provide patients the correct information whenever needed. We utilize a simplified scheme containing basic information that should become part of your knowledge. Such information will allow you to improve your performance in the relationship with HIV patients.

We recommend to carefully read and memorize the new concepts and then read the example of communication with HIV patients in which such concepts are utilized.

We encourage you to discuss similar situations within the patients' associations meetings and compare your experiences with the others to reach better results in your future activity.



2.1. Basic information

- Some patients with HIV show HIV-related symptoms. They are **symptomatic** patients.
- Some of the **symptoms of HIV** are prolonged fever, weight loss, persistent diarrhea, cough and difficulty on breathing.
- Some HIV patients are **asymptomatic**, that is they do not show symptoms, but the virus is already damaging their body.
- **Symptomatic** HIV patients (that are patients showing symptoms of HIV) **feel better and healthier after starting ART**.
- **Also asymptomatic** HIV patients need to **start therapy immediately**, so they can continue to be healthy.
- If HIV patients start therapy, they **protect** themselves and feel better. If not, they develop acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and they can die.
- Starting therapy is also an effective way to prevent HIV **transmission**.

2.2. Communication with patients

We will report here a possible **situation** where you can establish a positive communication with patients on the basis of the newly acquired scientific knowledge on why it is important to start therapy. The situation is followed by an example of **dialogue** between patient and you in your role of member of a patients' association supporting CASA project.

A patient resulted HIV-positive and therefore he/she needs to start therapy. Imagine you have to explain this patient why it is important to start therapy. The patient is worried about this condition and about the ART, but you have to convince the patient to start therapy because this will make him/her healthy. Here follows an example of a possible dialogue in such a situation.

Patient I am afraid because I had some friends and relatives who died from HIV. If I start therapy, will I survive?

You Yes. By taking therapy you can live with the disease for many years. It is possible for you to have a regular life. You will have more strength and energy so you can continue your normal activities.

Patient Ok... but how is it possible?

You Imagine that your body has an armor (like a protective covering) against the infections. The virus damages this armor so you are more vulnerable and you can catch other infections or diseases. Drugs will restore your armor and protect you.

Patient I see... but do these drugs have some adverse effects? I don't like to take medicines.

You As any other drugs, they can have side effects. They usually are mild side effects and last few weeks from the beginning of therapy. By the way, don't forget that starting and continuing therapy for all the life is essential for your survival.



You are encouraged to think of other possible dialogues with HIV patients, possible questions they may ask, and how you can help them to understand how important it is to start therapy on the basis of the clinical information you acquired in this lesson.

2.3. Questions on Lesson 2

We include two questions to help you memorize the concepts explained in this lesson. You should select the most appropriate answer. If you are not sure about the correct answer, please revise the lesson.

1. Which of the following sentences is true?

- a. Symptomatic patients do not improve by starting therapy.
- b. Asymptomatic patients will never need therapy and they will always be good.
- c. Starting therapy is important for both symptomatic and asymptomatic patients because drugs protect HIV patients from the virus so they don't develop other infections or diseases.

2. Can patients protect the others by regularly taking the drugs?

- a. No, patients are not protected by regularly taking drugs
- b. Yes, patients protect the others by regularly taking the drugs because therapy is an effective way to prevent transmission.
- c. It depends on patient's sex (male or female).

Lesson 3. Adherence to ART



We provide here some basic clinical concepts to explain why it is important for patients to adhere to therapy. We encourage you to memorize these concepts to be ready to provide patients the most appropriate explanations about adherence, to be used in different situations.

When you provide explanations to a person living with HIV, you are encouraged to use and merge all information you acquired in this training course on clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS.

Now, read the basic information we provide on ART, and try to memorize it. Then read the

example of a possible dialogue and then try to imagine a similar situation when you talk to a patient and you can use the newly acquired information.

You are encouraged to discuss it during the meetings with patients' associations or other meetings at health centers.

3.1. Basic information

- **Adherence** to therapy means that HIV patients are **regularly taking ART**.
- **Drugs** can control HIV infection, but they need to be **taken regularly to be effective**.
- If HIV patients adhere to therapy they have **longer, healthier lives**.
- If they take ART discontinuously, this become **ineffective**.
- If HIV patients do not adhere to therapy they will **feel worse**, develop other infections or diseases and **die**.
- After starting therapy, patients need to **regularly continue it even if they feel healthy**.
- It is important that patients strictly **follow information** about medications **given by nurses or doctors**.
- To be effective drugs should be taken **every day at the same time for the whole life**.

3.2. Communication with patients

We will report here a **situation** where you can establish a positive communication with patients with the objective to explain them why it is so important to adhere to therapy.

The newly acquired scientific knowledge on ART will be very useful for this purpose.

As usual, the description of the situation is followed by a possible **dialogue**.



A patient stops therapy because he/she feels better, gained weight, became stronger. You have to convince him/her to adhere to therapy.

Patient Why should I continue therapy if now I feel good?

You You are feeling good, just because you are taking drugs. If you stop you will feel worse, and develop other infections or diseases and die.

Patient OK, but generally everybody stops medicines when they feel better.

You Yes, but in the case of HIV the virus remains in your body and drugs are the only way to control it because you cannot eliminate it.

Patient I understand. But then, even if I interrupted my therapy, I can restart it when I feel worse.

You It is not the same because if you interrupt and then restart the therapy, it is less powerful and effective against the virus.

Patient I see, but sometimes I don't take drugs because it is a problem to go to hospital. I live far away and there is no transportation.

You I know, I can imagine how difficult it is, but it is very important to take regularly therapy. Other persons have the same problems and go and take drugs because they know it is essential for their life. Just think about your family: if you regularly take drugs you can support them because you are healthy.



Now we encourage you to think of other possible dialogues with HIV patients where you can help them to understand how important it is to adhere to therapy. You are invited to use the newly acquired information on adherence to persuade patients to continue to regularly take drugs, even when they feel good; in fact, you know that drugs should be taken every day, at the same time, for the whole life to be effective.

3.3. Questions on Lesson 3



The questions below will help you memorize the main concepts explained in this lesson. You should select one of the three suggested answers.

If you are not sure about the correct answer, please revise the lesson to be sure that you can find the correct answer to explain why it is important to adhere to therapy.

1. Why is it so important for HIV patients to adhere to therapy?

- a. To control the infection and have a longer and healthier life
- b. Adherence is not important and patients can take pills only when they are sick
- c. To make nurses happy

2. How often should ART be taken?

- a. Once a week
- b. Every day, at the same time
- c. Once a month

Lesson 4. Information on ART drugs

In this lesson we will provide here some basic clinical concepts about ART drugs and their side effects. We encourage you to memorize these basic concepts to be ready to provide patients the most appropriate explanations about antiretroviral drugs, whenever needed.

The knowledge about ART, together with the newly acquired knowledge on the importance of adherence will help you a lot to establish a positive relationship with patients and convince them of the importance to follow therapy.



4.1. Basic information

- **ART is the best weapon against HIV.**
- As any other treatment, ART can cause **side effects** (bad reactions after taking it).
- Usually side effects are mild and **last few weeks** after starting ART.
- The most frequent side effects are: **headache, abnormal dreams, insomnia and diarrhea.**
- In presence of these symptoms, patients should **not stop ART**. They should talk about those problems with nurses or doctors.
- Rarely, **severe side effects** may happen (for example acute skin reactions). In these cases, patients should **quickly refer to the health service.**
- Before taking other drugs, patients on ART should **ask to nurses**. Indeed, antiretroviral drugs and other medications can **interact** (influence each other), making the treatment ineffective or toxic.

4.2. Communication with patients

Now we report a possible **situation** where you can establish a positive communication with a patient on the basis of the newly acquired scientific knowledge on ART side effects and their management.

The situation is followed by a **dialogue** that may take place between a patient and you.



A patient has developed an ART-related side effect, so he/she wants to stop it. You have to explain him/her how to manage this situation.

Patient Since I started ART, two weeks ago, I have had strange dreams. I'm worried!

You I see, but do not be scared. This is a common side effect of your therapy. It is not dangerous.

Patient OK, but I cannot sleep well and I have to wake up early in the morning for working!

You I understand, I know it is hard at the beginning. But, believe me: most of the time this symptom disappears after 2-4 weeks.

Patient And if, in my situation, will it not stop? I think it is better for me to interrupt this therapy...

You If this symptom goes on, you have to speak with the nurse or doctor of your health facility. They are there to listen to you and to help you. If necessary, they can also change your therapy. But, please: do not stop ART on your own!



Patient I understand you perfectly, but living with all these problems is not easy.

You Of course, but think how important it is to take ART for you and your family. This side effect is a small obstacle on your way to have a healthy life.

You are now encouraged to think of other possible dialogues with HIV patients where you can help them to understand the meaning of drug-related side effects and how they can manage them.

4.3. Questions on Lesson 4

Now we recommend you to answer the following questions which will help you memorize the newly acquired knowledge on ART. If you are not sure about the answers, please read again the contents of this lesson.

**1. A patient has headache a few days after starting ART.
What should he/she do?**

- a. Immediately stop ART
- b. Continue ART and ask to the nurse or doctor
- c. Take ART discontinuously until the headache stops

2. How do you think ART-related side effects can be?

- a. They are always severe
- b. Side effects do not exist
- c. Most of the time, ART side effects are mild and transitory



Lesson 5. Why taking cotrimossazole

In this lesson we will provide some basic concepts about cotrimossazole; it is important for you to understand these concepts because some patients may be interested to know more about cotrimossazole or may be worried about the use of this drug.

We encourage you to memorize why taking cotrimossazole is important to be ready to provide patients the most correct information whenever needed.

Cotrimossazole is a drug, often associated with ART, to protect patients against other infections that may come, besides HIV.

As for the other lessons, you are invited to discuss the new concepts within your association and be ready to provide the best explanations when required.

Carefully read the basic information on cotrimossazole, try to memorize it and consider the answers provided in the following dialogue which may take place between you and a patient.



5.1. Basic information

- HIV makes the patients fragile and more exposed to other infections. Fortunately, besides the ART, patients have **another weapon** to protect themselves against these diseases: **cotrimossazole**.
- Cotrimossazole is an **antibiotic** able to prevent some infections that are more dangerous and frequent in HIV infected people, such as pneumonia or malaria.
- It is **used in severe HIV patients**. When doctors or nurses see that the normal barrier of the body against the infections are restored, they stop cotrimossazole.
- As the ART, to be effective cotrimossazole needs to be **taken regularly**, which means every day at the same time.
- As any other treatment, cotrimossazole can cause **side effects**. Moreover some patients can be allergic. Thus, if patients on cotrimossazole see any changes in their body (for example: skin reactions), they need to **contact the doctor or nurse** as soon as possible.
- Cotrimossazole is essential also for **newborn and children** who were exposed to the virus or are infected.
- Patients have to **strictly follow the indications** of doctors and nurses about when to start and when to stop this medication.

5.2. Communication with patients

We report here an example of a **situation** where you can use the newly acquired knowledge on the reasons why taking cotrimossazole.

The situation is followed by a possible **dialogue** that might take place between you and a HIV patient.

This is just an example, you are encouraged to use the newly acquired information on different situations.

A newly diagnosed HIV patient is taking ART and cotrimossazole. He/she does not understand why he/she needs to take both and would like to know more about cotrimossazole.

Patient The nurse prescribed me cotrimossazole. I really don't understand what is it...

You It is an antibiotic that protect you against the infections.

Patient Ok, but I am also taking my ART and it is hard. Isn't it enough? Why should I take another pill?

You You have just started your ART and it needs time to restore your defenses against the infections that the virus has just destroyed. Cotrimossazole will help you during this period and will protect you from developing sever diseases.

Patient So, I will not need this drug for the rest of my life... Right?

You Exactly. Through blood test nurses can understand if you are improving and if you don't need it anymore. In this case they will tell you to stop it and you can continue only the ART.

Now we invite you to think of other possible situations and dialogues with HIV patients where you can help them to understand why it is so important for them to take cotrimossazole.

We are sure that you will be able to develop a positive and effective communication with HIV patients taking into account information acquired in this lesson and also in the previous lessons.



5.3. Questions on Lesson 5

Now we recommend you to answer the following questions which will help you memorize the newly acquired knowledge on cotrimossazole.

If you are not sure about the answer, please read again the contents of this lesson.



1. What is cotrimossazole?

- a. Cotrimossazole is an antibiotic that protects HIV patients against some infections.
- b. Cotrimossazole is a vitamin to gain weight.
- c. Cotrimossazole is an antibiotic that substitutes the ART.

2. When should cotrimossazole be taken?

- a. Once a week.
- b. Once a month.
- c. Every day, at the same time.

Lesson 6. Living with HIV/AIDS

We provide here some basic concepts about some social aspects of HIV. It is important for you to become familiar with these issues.

We encourage you to discuss and memorize these concepts to be ready to provide patients the correct information and support whenever needed.



6.1. Basic information

- HIV diagnosis is **no longer a death sentence** because ART can control it.
- HIV infection is **not a reason of social isolation**. HIV positive people can have a **normal life**. They can continue their work and their activities, go to school, have a family and share time with friends and relatives.
- HIV infection doesn't mean that is not possible to have a **normal sexual life and a family**. Women can ask the health services to get information about family planning and safe pregnancy.

- Having HIV is a **private matter**. Infected person are not obliged **to** talk about their HIV status if they do not want. Nevertheless, if they **share** their status with a **trusted person**, they can receive support and help.
- HIV is **not a reason of shame**. Through the support of doctors, nurses and patients' associations, HIV positive persons can accept this condition and live with it.

6.2. Communication with patients

We report a possible **situation** where you can establish a positive communication with patients on the basis of your newly acquired knowledge on the social aspects of HIV.

A sixteen year student is HIV positive. She is worried about stigma among her classmates. Moreover, she has some concerns about her private life.

Patient Since I am HIV positive nobody of my classmates talks to me any longer!

You Listen, you are not obliged to share your HIV status with everybody. By the way, having some reliable friends might be a support for you. Moreover, whenever you will find someone who discriminates you, please don't care. Most of the time these persons do not know much about HIV.

Patient Ok... but what will happen if I have a boyfriend in the future? Will I ever have a normal relationship?

You Of course. Kissing and hugging someone are not ways of transmission. And if you wanted to have sex, you could do it by using condom.

Patient So you think I will have a normal life...

You Sure. You will complete your studies, find a job and have a family. This is possible because the ART therapy will ensure you a normal and healthy life.

As usual, you are invited to think of other possible dialogues with HIV patients and how you can help them explaining the best ways to face stigma and discrimination related to HIV.



6.3. Questions on Lesson 6



The questions below will help you memorize the main concepts explained in this lesson.

Be sure to find the correct answer (one o three) or revise the lesson if necessary to feel confident about how to explain patients the best way of living with HIV/AIDS.

You are encouraged to discuss these issues within your community.

1. When someone knows that is HIV positive, what should he/she do?

- a. He/she should communicate it to everyone.
- b. He/she should avoid crowded places and stay alone.
- c. He/she should speak about this HIV status only if he/she feels comfortable and with someone who trust.

2. Which of the following sentences is false?

- a. HIV is a reason of shame for positive patients and their family.
- b. HIV children can go to school and have fun with their friends as usual.
- c. HIV women can have a family and take care of their children.

Lesson 7. Main concerns for men and women


HIV has generally different implications for men and women, in fact it is known that prevalence is higher in women and that men generally have lower retention if compared with women. In this lesson we invite you to consider some basic information on sex and gender differences in the approach to HIV and see how you can help HIV patients to overcome major difficulties or stigma and live better.



As usual we offer some basic information on the issue and then some dialogues on different situations where such problems may be discussed as well as some final questions to check your new knowledge.

7.1. Basic information

- Biologically, **women are more likely to become infected** with HIV through unprotected heterosexual intercourse than men.
- Sometimes **women think they have fewer rights** within sexual relationships than their partners. They also may be afraid that their partner will leave them if they ask to use the condom.



Marriage does not always protect a woman from HIV infection. Many new infections occur within marriage because of unfaithful partners.

- Often **women** know that they are HIV positive before men because they have **more access to healthcare**, especially antenatal care. Thus, the man automatically assume that the woman was infected first.
- HIV-positive **women usually are adherent to ART** and follow the indications of the nurses better than men. In fact, men have more problems in accepting their disease and in treating it.
- In general **men do not wear the condom** because they do not feel comfortable in using it and mostly because they underestimate the possibility of get infected.
- In a couple using **condom is seen as lack of trust** and admission of being infected, instead, using **condom is the best practice** to take care and respect your own health and the health of your partner.
- **Condoms are distributed for free** in every health facilities. Moreover, in some ART clinic the patient does not need to ask for condoms to nurses because they are directly available in boxes.

7.2. Communication with patients

We will report here some possible **situations** where you can establish a positive communication with both men and women on the basis of the newly acquired knowledge on sex and gender differences in approaching HIV prevention and care.

The description of the situation is followed by a possible **dialogue** that may be useful and inspiring for you to develop an effective communication with patients taking into account sex and gender issues.



A boy wants to have a sexual intercourse with his girlfriend, but he does not care about wearing condom. You should convince him that it is important and explain why.

Boy I do not want to use condom because it makes sex less intimate and less enjoyable!

You Do you really believe this or is it something that your friends told you? Anyway, nothing is more intimate than protect you and your partner from HIV, from other sexually-transmitted disease and from an unwanted pregnancy.

Boy But I do not think I am HIV positive...
I do not use intravenous drugs and I have never had risky behaviors!

You You cannot be sure of it until you do the HIV test! Also in this case, you cannot be sure about the status of your partner.

Boy Ok, I see... but I do not have enough money...

You Do not worry because condoms are distributed for free in all health facilities. So, you can ask for it whenever you want.



A **boy** wants to have sex with his **girlfriend**. The girl is not sure whether he will use the **condom** or not; she knows it is important to use condom, but she is shy and she will not ask him.

Girl My partner asked me to have sex with him and I really would like to, but I'm scared about sexually-transmitted diseases.

You It is normal! But condom is the best way to have safe sex: it protects you from HIV, syphilis, gonorrhea and from unwanted pregnancy. By using it you can feel safe.



Girl Ok... But I am too shy to ask to my partner to wear it... This is a male affaire, so I should not think about it.

You This is not true. Protecting each other is a couple affaire. It is normal that you have these concerns and asking for safe sex is your right.

Girl But if I ask him to use condom he may think I am HIV infected...

You You should explain him what I told you before: using condoms is not an admission of illness but a way to protect your health and, consequently, the one of other person.

A **man**, father of two children, does not follow **therapy**. Try to understand why and convince him that it is important to follow therapy; if he wishes he may share his concerns and feel supported, but he is not obliged to do so.

You It seems that you have not come to your regular follow up at the ART clinic, since three months. Would you like to tell me what happened?

Man You know... I was really busy helping my family. Moreover, they do not know anything about my situation. It was impossible for me to come.

You It is very important that you speak with your family about your condition. They can help you. They can be on your side and support you when you need.

Man Yes, but I do not want to make them worried. And most of all, I am not sure that they will understand and that they will support me... My children could be ashamed of me.

You HIV is your own problem. It is a personal problem and it would be important to have a person of your trust to share concerns and receive support. Yet, you are not obliged to share your condition with everyone.
By the way, in all cases, having regular follow up and taking therapy regularly is the only way to have a healthier and longer life and share it with your family.

7.3. Questions on Lesson 7

The questions below will help you memorize the topics discussed in this lesson. You should select one of the three suggested answers.

If you are not sure about the correct answer, please revise the lesson to be sure that you can find the correct answer.



1. Why women are more adherent to therapy than men?

- a) Because they have more access to healthcare, especially antenatal care, and they accept better their diseases.
- b) Because HIV is more severe in women.
- c) There is no difference for adherence among women and men.

2. Which of these sentences about condom is correct?

- a) The man is the one in the couple who decide to use the condom or not.
- b) Condom is the best way to protect both men and women against HIV, sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy.
- c) Condoms are very expensive and difficult to find.

Appendix. Pre-test for basic training on clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS

Students shall answer the following questions of the pre-test before starting the course. Tutors will collect the answers of the pre-test. When you complete the course, there will be a final test. Tutors will also collect the answers of the final test which will then be compared with the results of the initial test. This is very important for us to evaluate both your progress and the effectiveness of the course.



Alamata. Sugar cane vendors

Pre-test questionnaire

Your name _____

Age _____ Sex _____

Highest level of education _____

Working place _____ Role _____

1. Do you think a course in clinical aspect of HIV will be useful to you?

Yes No I do not know

2. Did you attend previous courses in clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS?

Yes No I do not know

3. Are you interested to get a certificate of accomplishment?

Yes No I do not know

4. How long have you been in the Patients' Association?

3 months or less more than 3 months more than one year

5. Do you think it is important to take drugs for HIV?

Yes, it is very important to take drugs for HIV

No, it is not important to take drugs for HIV

I do not know

6. Do you think it is important for HIV patients to regularly take ART drugs?

Yes, it is important to take ART regularly

No, it is not important that you take ART regularly

I do not know

7. Are patients free to take ART whenever they wish?

Yes No I do not know

8. Do you know what is cotrimossazole?

Yes No I do not know

9. Do you think HIV is spread through the air?

No, HIV is mainly transmitted through unprotected sex

Yes, HIV is mainly transmitted through unprotected sex

I do not know

10. Do you think HIV infected patients should better live in isolation not to infect other people?

- No, infected patients can have a normal life and continue their works and their activities, go to school, have a family.
- Yes, it is better to isolate infected patients and do not have contacts with them
- I do not know



Students' notes

It may be very useful for students to take notes during the course. You can write your notes on a notebook or use these pages to fix important concepts you wish to remember, ideas you wish discuss with your colleagues, questions you would like to ask, suggestions for improvement, and any other matter that you think relevant in this course. You can ask questions to your tutor or send an e-mail to: contact@casaproject.info

General comments on the Course



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