

GIVING AN HIV DIAGNOSIS: A RESOURCE FOR DIAGNOSING DOCTORS

1. EFFECTIVE CLINICAL MANAGEMENT, INCLUDING ACCESS TO TREATMENT

- Reinforce to your patient HIV is a treatable, manageable chronic disease
- Highlight that treatment is safe, effective and starting treatment as soon as possible after diagnosis has many individual health benefits
- Discuss options of who can manage their HIV, including yourself and specialists
- Organise appropriate referrals to specialist services

“I realise that this diagnosis can seem challenging. Although it’s a serious disease, with treatment it is a manageable condition. The majority of people with HIV live normal healthy lives.

Only specialist HIV doctors can prescribe treatment, so we can discuss the best service to refer you to.

In terms of treatment, it’s safe, effective, most people find it easy to take and there is proven research that starting treatment as soon as possible after diagnosis has many health benefits. In Australia, treatment is free if you have a Medicare card. If you don’t have a Medicare card, your specialist will find another way for you to access affordable treatment. You will be able to chat about this further with your specialist.”

2. PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

- Ensure any urgent psychosocial issues are addressed
- Many patients benefit from counselling
- Advise them that there are many support services and provide them with the ‘Just Diagnosed with HIV?’ pamphlet
- Refer to the [Directory of HIV Services](#) to assist in identifying appropriate services
- Advise that services are available in their local area

“There are a range of support services available to help you to deal with your new diagnosis. For example: HIV, sex and relationships, legal, housing, financial, employment etc. Let’s talk about the kind of support that might be useful to you and I can give you information about them. If you’d like to check out a support person or have someone that’s not a doctor or nurse to talk to I can arrange this.

Think about who you might tell about the HIV diagnosis, because once you tell someone you are HIV positive you can’t ‘un-tell’ them.”

3. COUNSELLING ABOUT PREVENTION OF TRANSMISSION OF HIV TO OTHERS

- Advise the patient to take reasonable precautions to minimise the risk of HIV transmission to others, which include:
 - using a condom during sexual intercourse or
 - knowing that they have an HIV viral load of less than 200 copies/mL, usually as a result of being on effective treatment for HIV or
 - seeking and receiving confirmation from a sexual partner that they are taking HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)
- Assess possible HIV transmission risks
- Discuss who might be at immediate risk:
 - *Anyone your patient had unprotected sex with or injected drugs within the last 72 hours*
 - *Explain the availability of PEP for such contacts*
- If you are unsure whether these contacts have immediate risks call the [PEP Hotline](#) 1800 737 669

“People diagnosed with STIs, including HIV, are required, by law (NSW Public Health Act), to take reasonable precautions against transmitting HIV to another person. For HIV, reasonable precautions have been defined to be: using condoms during sexual intercourse or knowing that the virus is suppressed (i.e. having a HIV viral load of less than 200 copies/mL) by taking HIV treatment, or confirming with your sexual partner/s that they are taking HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). You should ensure you only inject with sterile injecting equipment and no one uses the equipment after you. You can discuss this further with your specialist HIV doctor who starts your HIV treatment. The sooner you start treatment the quicker your viral load will be suppressed.

If you have had sex without a condom with someone in the past 72 hours, medication may help prevent them getting HIV. Is there anyone who may be at risk?”

4. SUPPORT TO ENSURE THAT ALL AT RISK CONTACTS ARE IDENTIFIED AND TESTED FOR HIV

- Discuss partner notification with the patient
- Help the patient to identify partners at risk of infection
- Agree with the patient on who (clinician or patient) will notify each partner
- Ensure the patient has appropriate support and relevant information to provide to any partners they agree to notify, this may include details of peer support for patient led partner notification
- Make a plan to follow-up with the patient within an agreed time frame
- Support to help you with partner notification is available from your local sexual health service, as well as the NSW Sexual Health InfoLink (SHIL) 1800 451 624, who can also help notify partners known only through social media

“We can help you let your sexual and/or injecting partners know that they need a test for HIV.

You could let them know yourself or we can do it for you without mentioning who you are. Another options is we could work together to find a way for you to discuss this with them if you feel comfortable doing that. Or, we could put you in touch with a support service that can assist you to work out what to do”

5. LINKAGE TO RELEVANT SPECIALIST, COMMUNITY AND PEER SUPPORT SERVICES

- Assist with the referral process of your patient to appropriate clinical services, psychosocial support or relevant allied health services, peer and community services
- Arrange a follow up appointment with your patient to discuss how they are managing their HIV diagnosis, if they are linked in with support services and if they have undertaken contact tracing

“I can connect you with other health care and community-based services that support people living with HIV. It may feel too much right now, but you may find them useful in the future.

Other people have found it helpful to talk with and meet another person living with HIV, I can give you the details of an organisation to arrange this.”

Note: Refer gay men and other men having sex with men (MSM) to [Positive Life](#) 1800 245 677 and heterosexuals to [Poznet](#) 1800 812 404.

