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## Research Article

# THE KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE OF DENTAL STUDENTS TOWARDS HIV/AIDS PATIENTS

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### ABSTRACT

**Aim;** To investigate a group of dental students' knowledge about HIV infection, attitudes towards treating HIV/AIDS patients and behaviour practices.

**Materials and methods;** study population consisted of 180 dental students from BabuBanarasi Das College of Dental Sciences, Luck now. Who were treating patients in the clinics of the college? They were divided into 3 group's undergraduate students, post graduate students and interns. Standardized questionnaire was prepared and questions were based on 3 groups, i.e. knowledge and awareness, clinical manifestations of HIV and diagnosis & prognosis.

**Results;** out of 180 participants, majority had good knowledge regarding modes of HIV transmission, most of them willing to work and assist patients with HIV/AIDS.

**Conclusion;** the findings suggest that although students had good knowledge about HIV/AIDS, their attitude towards treating these patients was negative because of fear of transmission of this HIV infection to them.

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## INTRODUCTION

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is a globally emerging public health problem, caused by human immune deficiency virus [HIV]. HIV attacks the immune system by destroying CD4 positive T cells. India alone accounts for over 2.5million people living with HIV/AIDS with a prevalence of 0.91% [1,2]. The risk of occupational transmission of the virus from a patient to a health care provider has been estimated at 0.3% after a single percutaneous exposure to HIV infected blood [1]. The medical staff, in particular doctors and dentists who are directly in contact with the body fluids of patients, are at an increased risk of HIV/AIDS [3]. According to the world health organization [WHO] HIV-positive patients should be treated, but some dentists are reluctant to treat HIV/AIDS patients because of lack of knowledge and ignorance about the disease [4]. A sound knowledge is the key to develop right attitude in treating such patients. All dental students should have complete knowledge about the universal precautions to control the spread of HIV infection [2]. Keeping this in view, a study was conducted to assess the knowledge and attitude of dental students towards HIV/AIDS.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The HIV/AIDS awareness and knowledge of dental Students was assessed by means of a questionnaire. A validated questionnaire comprising of 24 questions was designed which was inclusive of both open and close ended questions relating to risk factors, modes of transmission, clinical appearance and diagnosis of HIV/AIDS. The survey was conducted among dental students in a college of North India.

### The study sample was divided into 3 groups

1. Group 1; final year students: 60
2. Group 2; interns: 48
3. Group 3; PG students: 38
4. Statistical analysis was performed using statistical package of social sciences [SPSS] software, version 16.0. Scores of knowledge items were summoned to obtain the percentage.

## RESULTS

The study was conducted on 146 dental students, out of which 60 students were studying in final year dental course, 48 students were doing internship and 38 students were doing

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post-graduation. Majority of interneers [100%] and post graduates [84.2%] showed good knowledge regarding modes of transmission when compared to final year students [35%]. The maximum score [100%] was for the question “coughing and sneezing can spread HIV/AIDS by the interneers and the minimum score [33.3%] was for the question “contact with saliva can spread HIV/AIDS by final year students. Majority of final year students [83.3%] are willing to work or assist with operative procedures on patients with HIV/AIDS as compared to interneers [52%] and post graduate students [81.5%]

SN	QUESTIONS	GP 1	GP 2	GP 3
1	Coughing and sneezing can spread HIV/AIDS?	35%	100%	84.21%
2	HIV/AIDS can spread from infected mother to Baby during breast feeding?	33.3%	85.4%	47.3%
3	Contact with saliva can spread HIV/AIDS?	33.3%	62.5%	63.1%
4	Sexual intercourse can spread HIV/AIDS?	98.3%	91.6%	100%
5	HIV/AIDS can spread when needles are Shared by IDU'S	91.6%	91.8%	92.1%
6	I am willing to work/assist with an operative Procedures on patients with HIV/AIDS	83.3%	52%	81.5%
7	Do you think usage of same dental instruments Can spread HIV/AIDS?	88.3%	89.5%	92.1%
8	HIV/AIDS patients can be identified by Physical appearance.	83.3%	68.7%	63.1%
9	Do you ask for HIV status of patients	30%	81.2%	71.5%
10	Those who visit your clinic Dentists with HIV/AIDS should not Allowed to practice	71.6%	83.3%	78.9%
11	Needle prick injury can transmit HIV virus	96.6%	89.5%	81.5%
12	Do you think spillage of blood of HIV/AIDS patient into open mucosal surfaces can lead to infection?	85%	72.9%	55.2%
13	There are no intraoral signs of HIV infection	86.6%	72.9%	84.2%
14	There is no test to detect HIV in the blood	88.3%	68%	92.1%
15	Heat sterilization can kill HIV	75%	68.7%	81.5%
16	Latex gloves cannot provide protection against HIV	63.3%	47.9%	57.8%
17	All exodontia patients should be routinely tested for HIV/AIDS	68.3%	27%	71.5%
18	HIV confirmatory test is western blot test	58.3%	52%	55.2%
19	HIV screening test is rapid HIV antibody test	70%	43.7%	68.4%
20	Critical value of CD4 count is below 200cells/cm <sup>3</sup>	78.3%	66.6%	78.9%
21	There is a vaccination to prevent HIV	81.6%	56.2%	71%
22	Treatment of HIV/AIDS patients requires special dental clinics	60%	41.6%	71%
23	Have you ever been associated with [met, talked, treated etc] with HIV/AIDS patients.	41.6%	45.8%	73.6%
24	HIV patients are first referred to ART centres	38.7%	70.8%	44.7%

## DISCUSSION

The results of my study revealed various startling facts about the knowledge, awareness and attitude of dental students towards HIV/AIDS.

In our study, we found that majority of interns and postgraduate students had good knowledge with respect to mode of transmission when compared to final year students. [The findings are superior when compared to study done in South Africa by Cohen *et al*].

88.3% of final year students, 81.7% of post graduate students are willing to assist or work with operative procedures on patients with HIV/AIDS when compared to interns [52%]. Most of the students are aware that use of same dental instruments from infected persons can spread HIV/AIDS and also they agree that HIV/AIDS patients cannot be identified by their physical appearance.

More than 80% of the students in all the three groups know that risk of HIV transmission more after needle prick injury-accordance to study done by Chauhan *et al*.

Awareness about the rapid HIV antibody test as a screening test for HIV found be significant in group 1 [70%] as compared to group 2 [43.7%] and group 3 [68.4%]. When asked about the confirmatory western blot test, results got more correct response 78.3% in group 1, 66.6% in group 2 and 78.9% in group 3. Maximum number of students in group 1 and 3 had good knowledge that no vaccination is available for prevention of HIV/AIDS; but in group 2 [43.75%] students claimed the availability of a vaccine that protect against HIV.

Regarding precautionary measures, the overall knowledge of all the students was found to be average, as 60% of them are unaware that latex gloves could provide protection against accidental exposure to HIV infection. Regarding the place of first referral of HIV patients after confirmation of HIV positive status is antiretroviral therapy [ART] centre was known to be 60% in group 1, 29.1% group 2 and 55.2% in group 3. [These findings differ from previous study by T RajuRagavendra *et al*].

## CONCLUSION

The overall knowledge of students about HIV/AIDS was adequate regarding mode of transmission, and most of them will to work or assist in patients with HIV infection, but there were inadequacies in infection control measures. So our efforts have been successful in spreading awareness among dental students and reducing the fear among them when managing HIV positive patients.

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