A LOCAL STUDY OF HIV TESTING IN INTENSIVE CARE PATIENTS – SHOULD WE MOVE TO OPT-OUT TESTING?

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Introduction

In the UK, an estimated 24% of patients with HIV remain undiagnosed. Current national guidelines do not specifically address the conduct of HIV testing in intensive care patients. However, the UK National Guidelines for HIV Testing 2008 recommend considering universal testing in all general medical admissions where diagnosed HIV prevalence in the local population exceeds 2 per 1000. HIV prevalence within the Milton Keynes Local Authority is in excess of this, at 2.89 per 1000. We conducted a retrospective study of HIV testing in our intensive care unit (ICU) as part of an evaluation of the need for a universal, opt-out HIV testing policy.

Methods

All unplanned admissions over a six-month period (1 August 2014 to 31 January 2015) were identified. Electronic pathology records were interrogated to see if HIV testing had been undertaken at any point prior to or during the patient’s ICU admission.

Results

During this six-month period, there were 198 unplanned admissions to our ICU. From the hospital’s electronic records, 164 patients (83%) were not tested at any point prior to or during their ICU admission. Of the 34 patients (17%) who were tested, 25 patients (13%) had been tested prior to ICU admission and 9 patients (4%) were tested during their ICU admission. All tested patients were negative for HIV except one patient with previously diagnosed HIV.

Discussion

Our current practice of HIV testing is based on clinical assessment of an individual patient’s risk for HIV. The consequence of this is a low rate of testing, despite our high local prevalence. In Milton Keynes, 75% of HIV diagnoses are made late (CD4 count<350 cells/mm³) compared with a national average of 50%. It is likely that patients admitted to our ICU are missing the opportunity for early diagnosis and treatment. In light of this, we have just introduced a universal, opt-out HIV testing policy.

Figure 1: What proportion of patients were tested for HIV and when were they tested?

- Tested during ICU admission: 4%
- Tested 3/12 prior to ICU admission: 9%
- Tested <3/12 prior to ICU admission: 16%
- Not tested at any point: 83%

Summary:

- There is a lack of specific guidance relating to the conduct of HIV testing in intensive care patients. However, the national guidelines are broadly applicable to the ICU setting.
- In our 6-month retrospective review of unplanned ICU admissions, only 4% of patients were tested for HIV during their ICU admission.
- This low rate of testing is concerning given our high local HIV prevalence (2.89/1000) and late diagnosis rate (75%).
- We have just introduced a universal, opt-out HIV testing policy on our ICU.
- Even in ICUs where local HIV prevalence does not reach the threshold (2/1000) for universal testing, a significant proportion of ICU patients present with a clinical indicator disease for HIV infection.
- All ICUs should consider how they can locally implement the national guidelines.

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References:

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