

Sexually Transmitted Infections among HIV positive MSM prior to HCV infection

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Background

Hepatitis C (HCV) among HIV-positive men who have sex with men (MSM) who deny injection drug use is likely to be acquired through sexual contact. Recurrent Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are an indication of unsafe sexual practices and may be associated with HCV infection.

Methods

- In a retrospective study we analysed the laboratory data of 16 HCV-positive/HIV-positive MSM (cases) with HCV diagnosis in 2010. We selected 32 HCV-negative/HIV-positive MSM (controls), followed at the HIV/STI-clinic in Antwerp, Belgium. All laboratory confirmed STI episodes (syphilis, gonorrhoea, lymphogranuloma venereum, and rectal and urethral non-LGV chlamydial infections) were recorded since the date of presentation at our clinic, until the date of HCV diagnosis of the cases. Controls were selected from consecutive patients that consulted on the same day. Both cases and controls were regularly followed up at the clinic for their HIV-infection. Syphilis screening is part of the three or four monthly laboratory check-up. The clinic is the first point of contact in case of signs or symptoms of an STI.
- STI episodes were defined on the basis of laboratory results: HCV infection was determined using a screening test and confirmed with a Line Immunoassay. Syphilis was diagnosed by RPR and TPPA seroconversion (primo-infection) or \geq fourfold rise of RPR-titer (re-infection), gonorrhoea by culture and chlamydial infection by PCR. All STIs were treated according to CDC-treatment guidelines 2010.
- We applied Poisson regression to assess the difference in number of STI-episodes per person-month of follow-up (FU) between cases and controls.

Results

	N	Months of follow-up	N Syph	N Gono	N LGV - C. trach	N non LGV-C.trach	Total STI-episodes	N STI per 100 months of FU	P-value
Cases	16	1049	15	10	2	4	31	2.9	0.005
Controls	32	1848	17	2	2	5	26	1.4	
Total	48	2897	32	12	4	9	57	2.0	

Conclusion

The number of episodes of STIs, prior to acquisition of HCV was significantly higher for HCV-positive cases than for HCV-negative controls. All patients were followed at the clinic for HIV-positivity, as such an indication of risky sexual behaviour. In Antwerp, a setting with a rising incidence of HCV-infection among HIV-positive MSM, an easy to recognise event such as recurrent STIs should lead to intensified screening for HCV and counselling of the patient.