

Response to ‘Anal cancer screening and Pap testing acceptability among HIV-positive men who have sex with men populations’

Editor,

Participation of patients is key to establishing successful prevention programs in health care. Unfortunately, the attendance of follow-up appointments in our study was low due to various reasons. In general, our impression during the study was that anal Pap smear screening was well-tolerated by study participants and low patient acceptance of the examination was not the main reason for a low rate of follow-up appointments.¹ However, we did not further investigate what caused the low attendance rates within our study. Kerr *et al.*² address this important issue in their comment and present interesting data on patients' acceptance concerning anal carcinoma screening. The authors evaluated the perceived pain, discomfort and embarrassment experienced by 203 HIV-positive men who have sex with men (MSM) before and after their first anal Pap smear at an outpatient clinic. Following the examination, study participants found anal Pap smear testing to be significantly less painful, less uncomfortable and less embarrassing compared with their perceptions beforehand. In addition, the majority of patients in this study (96%) responded in a questionnaire that they would participate to annual anal Pap smear screening. These results illustrate that this screening protocol is well-accepted by this patient group. The conclusion by Kerr *et al.* supports that anal Pap smear screening could be a valuable screening tool for HIV outpatient clinics in risk groups. We agree that further evaluation of anal Pap testing for HIV-positive patients is necessary and future studies should also include assessment of patient engagement and attendance concerning screening programmes. We hope that new studies will address this important question to improve prevention strategies for HIV patients in the primary care setting.

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