RISK FACTORS FOR TRANSMISSION OF HIV IN A HOSPITAL ENVIRONMENT: DOES KNOWLEDGE EQUAL IMPLEMENTATION?

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Abstract: Nearly three decades since its discovery, HIV/AIDS continues to affect people of all categories worldwide. According to the International Labor Organization and the World health organization (2004), the workplace should be where health is protected and accidents and diseases are prevented. Although several institutions have introduced HIV/AIDS prevention programs in their settings, sometimes these have not necessarily been comprehensive, nor have there been strictly implemented. This is more so in hospital settings where the risks of contracting HIV infection are higher both for the health care personnel and the patient. In order to assess risk factors for HIV transmission within a hospital setting, a rapid evaluation method was applied to health personnel of a hospital using pre-structured questionnaires, after their verbal consent. The questionnaires were designed to obtain information on available logistics and facilities for HIV prevention in the hospital and the preventive measures and attitudes adopted by the health care personnel. Furthermore, sporadic direct observational visits were made to the various services of the institution, and the findings were noted. Of 409 respondents to the study, 66.3\% constituted the nursing staff, 14.4\% doctors, 8.3\% laboratory staff and the rest (11\%) consisted of orderlies and morgue attendants. Each service seemed to have facility for sterilization, although some were out of order. Soap, antiseptic solutions and detergents were not constantly available in some of the services of the hospital. Protective gloves were sometimes out of stock and masks, aprons and glasses were non-existent in most services. Some services had no official registers for recording exposures and/or accidents occurring to the staff or patients. Of the respondents, only 45.4\% and 70.9\% respectively washed their hands regularly before and after each activity within the hospital. About 52.7\% regularly used gloves for risky tasks such as cleaning soiled instruments or blood spilled on work surfaces. However, the usage of gloves was 100\% for all surgical procedures. Used instruments were always cleaned and sterilized before use by 84.9\% of the health workers. The single use of disposable surgical blades was regularly ensured by 83.1\% of the respondents. Concerning attitudes and risk behavior by the health workers, about 75.5\% of them always recapped needles after use while 34.7\% washed and/or disinfected soiled gloves for reuse. At least one needle prick injury had occurred in 60.7\% of health workers within the last year (mostly during recapping), and very few made any official reports of these, or other exposures (direct contact with body fluids including splashes to the face and eyes), for fear of being screened for HIV. Interestingly, safety precautions were posted on notice boards within the hospital services. Although frequent shortages of protective materials in resource-limited settings increases risks for the transmission of infectious pathogens, more emphasis needs to be laid not only on diffusing universal precautions and recommendations for staff safety in hospital and laboratory settings, but accompanying measures for monitoring and evaluation of implementation of these standards must be taken.

Key words: HIV transmission; health workers, safety measure