

Men and HIV: longer lives, new problems

Shaun Watson

Clinical Nurse Specialist (HIV Community) for Westminster
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, London, UK

Now that HIV has turned 30, the subject of men and men's issues is more pertinent than ever. More reliable, effective and sophisticated treatments certainly allow people to live longer, healthier lives with HIV – but we still have a huge transmission problem as the rate of new infections continues to rise. While some groups have seen a steady, consistent increase, the 2012 statistics for MSM (men who have sex with men) were disturbing. Figures supplied by the Health Protection Agency (HPA) in November 2012 [1] showed that an estimated 73,400 people were aware of their HIV diagnosis in the UK by the end of 2011, with the highest prevalence among MSM.

New diagnoses for MSM were 3010 in 2011, which is an all-time high (2000 were diagnosed in 2002, following an initial dip in the late '80s and '90s). We now have an estimated 31,900 MSM and 14,400 heterosexual men living with HIV in the UK. Because antiretroviral medications have improved and most HIV-positive men are living longer lives, we are now seeing new problems, such as the rise of cancers (particularly anal cancers). Today's young people born with HIV are rapidly becoming sexually active young adults, with all the issues this brings. We have an older MSM population who face a potential rise in poverty, social isolation, anxiety, stress and depression because of proposed changes to the benefits system. There is an alarming increase in the use of recreational drugs, particularly crystal methamphetamine and mephedrone, with an associated rise in high-risk sexual activities.

We wanted this issue to include a variety of perspectives on the lives of HIV-positive men today. After years of hearing colleagues say that they are 'going to open a nursing home for gay men',

I wanted to look closely at the issues surrounding older gay men and HIV and consider what is key in offering effective support. David Stuart discusses the relationship between men, recreational drugs and HIV – a timely piece given recent press coverage [2] and ongoing debate around the legalisation of some recreational drugs. Meanwhile, after another record-breaking testing event, Jake Jenkins tells us about the innovative testing clinic run in one of London's gay bars, with case studies on some of the men they support – a great collaboration between the NHS and business. Alison Barnes offers a two-part article about the work that Body & Soul does with young men facing young adulthood after a lifetime living with HIV, which compliments an autobiographical piece from Terence Higgins Trust's Straight Talk group. The result is a selection of interviews and testaments from men of different ages who live with HIV – and a valuable insight on the issues they face. Juliet Bennett's 'HIV update' for this issue reviews the rise of anal cancers in HIV-positive men, plus recent developments in anal screening.

We welcome feedback and suggestions – do share your views with us and let us have your ideas for future content.

References

1. Health Protection Agency (HPA). *HIV in the United Kingdom: 2012 Report*. HPA, London, 2012.
2. Kirby T, Thornber-Dunwell M. High-risk drug practices tighten grip on London gay scene. *Lancet*, 2013, **381**, 101–102. See also Pink News at: www.pinknews.co.uk/2013/01/11/london-rise-of-sexually-transmitted-infections-on-gay-scene-linked-to-crystal-meth/ (accessed January 2013).

Correspondence to: Shaun Watson
Shaun.watson@chelwest.nhs.uk