Latecomers: A regional pilot study of delayed HIV presentation

P Dobson1,2  R Riley1  B Green3  M Boyle1,2
1. John Hunter Hospital Newcastle NSW 2. Faculty of Health & Medicine University of Newcastle 3. HARP Health Promotion Tamworth

Introduction
Delayed HIV presentation is a major risk factor for HIV related premature death or irreversible HIV neurological disease. Despite this risk, 20 years after the introduction of highly active antiretroviral therapy, and more than 30 years of targeted HIV testing education, delayed HIV diagnosis remains commonplace with late diagnoses 12% and advanced diagnoses 27% of all new diagnoses in our region 2010-2015.

Method
A 34 question survey was developed to determine: • who in our cohort had delayed presentation, • missed opportunities for earlier diagnosis, • attitudes and knowledge around testing, and • if there were interventions that would have made these clients present earlier. Patients diagnosed from 2010-2015 presenting late (<350 CD4 cells or advanced HIV disease (<200 CD4 cells) were identified from the client records of the John Hunter Hospital, Pacific Clinic Sexual Health Newcastle, or Tamworth Sexual Health Service. Consent was obtained. Surveys were administered either in a face-to-face interview, telephone interview, online, or paper based survey.

Results
Who presented late?
Forty five participants met the CD4 count criteria for delayed presentation, eight were excluded (seroconversions, deceased, diagnosis date unknown). Of the remaining 37, 14 (38%) declined interview, telephone interview, online, or paper based survey.

Reason that led to first positive test
69% of respondents were tested because they felt unwell or were admitted to hospital

Risk Perception
When asked if they considered themselves to be at risk of getting HIV prior to their diagnosis, the majority of latecomers (61.5%), including all of the women, said not at all. Only one respondent, an MSM, felt that they were at high risk.

Only one latecomer knew someone else with HIV before their diagnosis

Missed Opportunities
Only 54% said they knew where they could get tested for HIV before diagnosis. No females were aware of where to get tested.

Only four latecomers had ever ASKED a health professional for a HIV test

Only three latecomers had ever had a sexual history taken by a health care worker

Conclusion
Around 70% of respondents believed that they had no risk or a small risk of acquiring HIV, and the majority identified a lack of information or education on HIV and testing a factor impacting on their delayed diagnosis. Given the serious consequences of delayed presentation, we recommend that: • testing and treatment outcomes information be made accessible to wider populations than is currently available • testing should be offered more opportunistically • safety and confidentiality around testing be maintained.

Acknowledgements
The authors would like to thank Erin Singer for interviewing patients. Dr Nathan Ryder and Kylie Vogt from Pacific Clinic, Newcastle and Grant Sweeney from Tamworth Sexual Health for assistance recruiting patients.

Disclosure of Interest Statement
The research was supported by Dr Michael Boyle’s AIDS education & research fund. No industry support was obtained for the conduct of this research project.

Corresponding author: richard.riley@nswhealth.nsw.gov.au