

KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF DENTAL STUDENTS TOWARDS HIV INFECTION AND AIDS

H.N.S. SOYSA AND A.D.S. ATUKORALA

*Department of Oral Medicine and Periodontology, Faculty of Dental Sciences, University of
Peradeniya, Peradeniya*

The objective of the present study was to ascertain the knowledge and perception of dental students in Sri Lanka towards Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection and AIDS. A questionnaire-based survey was conducted among 114, 1st and 2nd year dental students of the Faculty of Dental Sciences, University of Peradeniya. The responses for the questions were compared with a similar study conducted on school children in Sri Lanka. The response rate to the questionnaire was 100%. The mean age of the students was 21.3 years with a range of 21 to 27 years. The study group comprised 46 males and 68 females. 55% of the students were in the 1st year and 45% were in the 2nd year students, 80% were Sinhalese, 16% were Tamil students and 4% were Muslims. All students attributed the disease to a virus. The majority (99%) attributed the transmission of disease to sexual intercourse. Blood transfusion (97%) and infected mother (80%) were also considered as common modes of transmission. An unexpected response was that mosquitoes were also considered as a source of transmission of the disease. This was mentioned by 6 (5%) 1st year dental students. Tourism (93%), prostitution (82%) and drug abuse (34%) were regarded as the main contributors towards the spread of HIV infection. 99% of students perceived AIDS as a serious disease and a 92% considered it as a problem for Sri Lanka at present.

The results showed that, there was a high degree of awareness about the illness and a satisfactory level of knowledge pertaining to the nature of causative agent, sources of infection and transmission. However their knowledge regarding prevention was inadequate. Most perceived AIDS as a serious illness. The study indicated that education on AIDS should be directed and promoted among the young student population, where knowledge of the disease seemed wanting.

Acknowledgement: The authors are grateful to Dr. S.M.X. Corea and Professor U. Illangasekera for their advise.