

Thursday 8 September 2016: for immediate release

Sexual health charity launches new edition of popular booklet to improve HIV diagnosis and care in general practice

MEDFASH (Medical Foundation for HIV & Sexual Health)¹ today launches a revised and updated edition of its popular booklet *HIV in Primary Care - an essential guide for GPs, practice nurses and other members of the primary healthcare team*².

The launch coincides with a multidisciplinary conference in London³, which will highlight the increasingly important roles general practitioners and primary care teams have to play in the diagnosis, treatment and care of their patients who have HIV.

Thanks to effective treatments, early diagnosis of HIV saves lives and helps prevent new infections. Almost one in five of the 103,700 people estimated to be living with HIV in the UK are still undiagnosed⁴. Although over 6,000 are newly diagnosed each year, two-fifths have a late diagnosis, which is associated with a greater risk of serious illness and a tenfold increased risk of death within a year⁵. In contrast, early diagnosis and treatment leads to better health outcomes and lower healthcare costs. It also lowers infectivity, which dramatically reduces the risk of passing the infection on to a partner⁶.

Many people with undiagnosed HIV use primary care but, even when presenting with symptoms that might indicate HIV, evidence shows that they are not always offered an HIV test.

Responding to this challenge, MEDFASH has issued a new edition of *HIV in Primary Care* to help GPs, practice nurses and other members of the primary healthcare team improve rates of HIV diagnosis and provide high quality care for their patients diagnosed with HIV. This will support implementation of NICE guidelines on HIV testing⁷ which are being updated this year and will also encourage the development of a partnership approach between patients, primary care and specialist centres. Such an approach is now essential, the charity says, because HIV is increasingly managed as a chronic disease, with most people on treatment living a near-normal life span.

Ruth Lowbury, Chief Executive of MEDFASH, said today: “Most people will go to their GP if they have health problems. By offering a test whenever they think HIV might be an underlying cause of their patients’ problems, GPs can help reduce late diagnosis of HIV. Our booklet offers practical guidance on when to consider testing and how to talk to patients about it – it shows that HIV testing in general practice need not be difficult or time-consuming.”

Professor Maureen Baker, who is Chair of Council of the Royal College of General Practitioners and wrote a foreword to the booklet, said: “The benefits of early HIV diagnosis are clear, but too many people living with HIV remain undiagnosed. This booklet will give GPs and their teams a number of ideas about how to increase HIV testing and improve diagnosis in both symptomatic and asymptomatic patients in their practice. The guidance takes a pragmatic, ‘GP-centred’ approach. It is a resource by GPs, for GPs, which I can strongly recommend.”

Dr Surinder Singh, a GP from Deptford in London and co-author of the booklet, said: “With growing HIV prevalence and the move toward shared care models for people with long-term conditions, GPs increasingly find themselves dealing with people with HIV. The essential element is trust: ensuring that patients feel confident to disclose their positive HIV status is key and we hope this booklet will give GPs the information they need to provide excellent primary care for HIV-positive patients. Remember that the local HIV specialist unit is available to answer questions from GPs.”

The booklet provides essential information about HIV for GPs and the primary healthcare team, specifically:

- the clinical diagnosis of HIV in primary care, with photographs
- how to offer an HIV test and give results
- primary healthcare for people with HIV, including reproductive health and immunisation
- how to complement HIV specialist care
- practice policies and systems
- a quick reference guide to antiretrovirals, drug interactions and side effects, managing HIV-related problems, information for patients and a list of useful HIV and sexual health organisations and websites.

HIV in Primary Care is instructive, practical and easy to use with a comprehensive index and full colour illustrations.

Printed copies of the new edition can be obtained from MEDFASH at £12 per copy by contacting: enquiries@medfash.bma.org.uk, or the pdf version can be downloaded for £5. For details see <http://www.medfash.org.uk/publications>

Ends

Notes to editors

¹ MEDFASH* (Medical Foundation for HIV & Sexual Health) is an independent charity dedicated to quality in HIV and sexual healthcare. We have been supporting and guiding health professionals and policy-makers since 1987.

² *HIV in Primary Care: an essential guide for GPs, practice nurses and other members of the primary healthcare team*. Third edition by Dr Philippa Matthews, Dr Sara Madge, Dr Surinder Singh and Dr Nick Theobald. Published by MEDFASH, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9JP. The booklet can be ordered by contacting enquiries@medfash.bma.org.uk or the pdf purchased directly at: www.medfash.org.uk

Drs Matthews and Singh are practicing GPs, Drs Madge and Theobald are HIV specialists with a background in general practice. All the authors are involved in GP education.

³ The multidisciplinary conference, *HIV in primary care – shared care*, organised by the British HIV Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), will be held at the RCGP on Friday, 9 September 2016.

⁴ More than 103,700 people in the UK were estimated to be living with HIV at the end of 2014, of whom 17% (18,100) were undiagnosed. Of those newly diagnosed in 2014, two out of five people already had “late stage” HIV. More information on HIV epidemiology can be found on the PHE website – <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hiv-in-the-united-kingdom>

⁵ Being diagnosed late is associated with a tenfold increased risk of death within one year of diagnosis. In 2014, of the 613 people with HIV who died, most were diagnosed late, according to Public Health England’s [HIV new diagnoses, treatment and care in the UK: 2015 report](#)

⁶ The [Position statement on the use of antiretroviral therapy to reduce HIV transmission. September 2014](#) (British HIV Association (BHIVA) and Expert Advisory Group on AIDS (EAGA)) states that there is now conclusive randomised clinical trial evidence, from heterosexual couples where one partner has HIV and the other does not, that if the partner who is HIV positive is taking effective antiretroviral therapy, transmission of HIV

through vaginal sex is significantly reduced (by 96%). It also refers to direct evidence in support of a similar very low risk of onward transmission during condomless anal intercourse (eg between men).

⁷ [*HIV testing: increasing uptake among people who may have undiagnosed HIV. NICE guideline*](#) was issued as a [draft for consultation](#) in May 2016 and is expected to be published in December 2016. It includes a section of recommendations for healthcare professionals in GP surgeries.

PRESS CONTACT DETAILS

For further information, to request a review copy or to speak to Ruth Lowbury, MEDFASH Chief Executive contact: rlowbury@MEDFASH.bma.org.uk, 020 7383 6345 or 07810 181843.

High resolution image of booklet available [here](#).

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