HIV in Elderly

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HIV/AIDS is a devastating worldwide pandemic, impacting not only those who are infected, but also their families, the healthcare system, the economy and the political sphere. In India the prevalence of HIV is 0.29%. It is seen mainly in the adult population,¹ but there are an increasing number of older people infected with HIV.² This may be due to increased awareness and the availability of the ART treatment. HIV/AIDS destroys an immune system of already weakened by ageing. Therefore in older individuals its progression is more rapid and unrelenting [1]. It is further complicated by other chronic conditions. On the other hand the sign and symptoms of HIV are often taken for the sign and symptoms of aging (see footnote 2). Older HIV/AIDS patients may be less likely than younger patients to have the informal care and social support afforded by friends and family. They may also experience more isolation, loneliness, and depression [2].

HIV infection in the elderly population is rarely studied. A total of 3580 individuals comprising 2364 (66.03%) male and 1216 female (33.97%) with age 50 and above presented to the Integrated Counseling and Testing Centre at Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Puducherry from January 2008 to June 2009. A single serum sample was taken from all subjects after obtaining written consent and was tested for HIV antibodies as per National AIDS Control Organization strategy three. A total of 64 (1.79%) subjects were HIV positive.

This is very high when compared to the overall prevalence of 0.29% in 2008–09 from India (see footnote 1). It may be because of sample bias. People approaching the hospital for HIV testing are in a higher risk group of HIV infection than the general population. Thirty-nine males (60.94%) and 25 females (39.06%) were among the HIV positive cases. This is similar to the general population in 2006 from India (see footnote 1). We observed that samples tested for HIV were more from male subjects (66.03%) as compared to female subjects (33.97%). Since we tested more samples from male subjects, we are getting more HIV positive male subjects. Male to female ratio in Puducherry was 1:1 as per 2001 census.³ Therefore it appears that there is underreporting of HIV infection especially from the elderly female subjects. It emphasizes the need to do more work especially in this area.

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