

Written medicines information for South African HIV/AIDS patients: does it enhance understanding of co-trimoxazole therapy?

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Abstract

Written information to promote patient education is being increasingly recognized as an integral part of quality health care. The main objective of this study was to evaluate the effect of distributing a patient information leaflet (PIL) on knowledge acquisition and recall. Two different PILs were designed for co-trimoxazole tablets: a simple, shorter PIL that incorporated pictograms and text and a text-only PIL that was longer and more complex. Human immunodeficiency virus-positive participants on chronic co-trimoxazole therapy were enrolled from five local primary health care clinics in Grahamstown, South Africa, and were randomly allocated to a Control Group (no PIL), Group A (text-only PIL) or Group B (simple PIL with pictograms). At the preliminary interview, demographic data were collected and the tablets dispensed according to normal clinic protocol. In a follow-up interview 30 days later, participant medicines knowledge was investigated by asking a series of questions. The mean percentage for medicines knowledge was significantly higher in the group that received the simple PIL incorporating pictograms (76.3%), compared with both the Control Group (43.3%) and the group who received the longer, text-only PIL

(50.9%). This study endorses the value of providing patients with an appropriately designed PIL to inform appropriate medicine-taking behaviour.

Introduction

Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) is the principal cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa and the fourth biggest killer worldwide [1]. With developing countries being the most affected, HIV/AIDS has become the most severe and overwhelming disease facing the world today [2]. In South Africa, 20.1% of the total population, ~5 million people, are infected making it the country with the largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world [3]. Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP) is the most common, life-threatening opportunistic infection which can affect HIV-positive patients due to their weakened immune system. It presents itself as a lung infection, but can often spread to other organs. Co-trimoxazole is taken as an oral tablet and is used both for the prevention and the treatment of PCP.

Patients with HIV/AIDS are often on long term, multiple drug therapy [4] and as such it is crucial that such patients take charge of and responsibility for their health. Kitching [5] stated, 'Lack of information has been identified as a major factor among 250 reasons why patients do not take their medicines as the prescriber intends'. The patient information leaflet (PIL) is one of the most widely used tools for patient education and health promotion [5, 6] and provides the patient with

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