



EDİTÖRE MEKTUP / LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Strengthening HIV testing services through innovative approaches: World Health Organization

Yenilikçi yaklaşımlarla HIV testi hizmetlerinin güçlendirilmesi: Dünya Sağlık Örgütü

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Cukurova Medical Journal 2020;45(3):1248-1249

To the Editor,

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection has been regarded as one of the major public health concerns affecting the general population worldwide¹. The available estimates suggest that almost 38 million people are living with the infection while in excess of 32 million people have lost their lives due to disease associated complications. Moreover, 1.7 million new cases were diagnosed in 2018 itself and it is quite alarming that 75% of the people living in the African region are infected with the disease. In addition, more than 8 million people could not be diagnosed, owing to which they failed to avail the anti-retroviral treatment (ART)¹.

On an encouraging note, due to the consistent efforts of multiple stakeholders, the coverage of diagnostic and treatment services has gradually improved¹. In fact, more than 60% of the infected adults from developing nations and 80% of the pregnant / breastfeeding women are already on ART. It is quite encouraging that 80% of infected people are aware about their status, while close to 54% have accomplished suppression of the viral load. Further, since the start of the 21st century, a significant decline of 37% has been reported in the incidence of infection^{1,2}. Moreover, considering that the infection can be detected through rapid kits and the patient can be immediately started on ART, it is a great boon to the prevention and control services.

However, the above estimates clearly suggest that the services of testing, treatment and supportive care is

not available to all and in the absence of urgent and targeted actions, we won't be able to meet the set global targets for 2020^{2,3}. Even though, many people are getting appropriate treatment, many more have not been able to access the same due to not being diagnosed². In other words, diagnosis is the crucial step to ensure that all the infected people are benefited and for averting all the adverse consequences³⁻⁵. The World Health Organization has advocated for HIV self-testing in various population groups based on the evidence that most of the high-risk population groups are more comfortable with self-testing instead of going to the health care establishments^{2,3}.

It has been envisaged that all the nations should adopt a standard strategy for diagnosis comprising of 3 successive tests to get a more accurate result². Further, in order to reach high-risk groups, social network-based testing has been recommended as they account for the maximum incidence and risk of transmission of infection². In addition, an innovative strategy in the form of use of digital messages (viz. brief message or videos) by the peers themselves can be of immense utility in improving the testing rates². Moreover, delivery of rapid testing through lay providers and use of dual (HIV and Syphilis) rapid tests among pregnant women has also been recommended to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of both infections^{2,5}.

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge that the process to save lives from the infection actually starts with detecting the infection at the earliest. The newly

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Geliş tarihi/Received: 30.11.2019 Kabul tarihi/Accepted: 11.03.2020 Çevrimiçi yayın/Published online: 31.08.2020

proposed recommendations will be of immense utility for the policy makers to expedite their battle against the infection.

Yazar Katkıları: Çalışma konsepti/Tasarımı: SS, PS; Veri toplama: SS, PS; Veri analizi ve yorumlama: SS, PS; Yazı taslağı: SS, PS; İçeriğin eleştirel incelenmesi: SS, PS; Son onay ve sorumluluk: SS, PS; Teknik ve malzeme desteği: SS, PS; Süpervizyon: SS, PS; Fon sağlama (mevcut ise): yok.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazarlar çıkar çatışması beyan etmemişlerdir.

Finansal Destek: Yazarlar finansal destek beyan etmemişlerdir.

Author Contributions: Concept/Design : SS, PS; Data acquisition: SS, PS; Data analysis and interpretation: SS, PS; Drafting manuscript: SS, PS; Critical revision of manuscript: SS, PS; Final approval and accountability: SS, PS; Technical or material support: SS, PS; Supervision: SS, PS; Securing funding (if available): n/a.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: Authors declared no conflict of interest.

Financial Disclosure: Authors declared no financial support

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