

# THE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING WITH HIV AND ANAL CANCER: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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## BACKGROUND

- The incidence of anal cancer in people living with HIV is up to 40 times higher compared with the general population [1] and it occurs at a much younger age [2–3].
- Incidence has risen with the widespread use of HAART [4-5]. This may relate to the longer survival of people living with HIV
- Prognosis is good, but chemoradiotherapy causes long-term toxicities to skin, bowel, bladder & sexual function all of which have a significant psycho-social impact.
- This combines with other intersecting challenges such as HIV-related stigma & being part of the LGBTQ+ community.

This work explored the experiences of patients treated at our London centre to identify their specific challenges and inform future research to improve their care.

## AIM

To understand experiences and identify specific challenges of people living with HIV & treated with chemoradiotherapy for anal cancer

## METHODS

- Exploratory qualitative study consisting of a focus group and individual interviews
- Approval granted for a service evaluation by the Royal Marsden and Institute for Cancer Research Committee for Clinical Research
- Eligible patients: living with HIV, diagnosed with anal cancer, completed pelvic chemoradiotherapy and currently in follow-up at our centre
- Focus group had a researcher and a patient representative facilitator. Discussion & interviews digitally recorded & transcribed
- Data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach [6], aided by reflexive notes [7] & with patient representative input.

## RESULTS

- A total of 8 men participated in this study.
- The participants had a median age of 60 years (range 50-68)
- One focus group and 4 individual interviews were conducted
- Participant demographics and timing of HIV & anal cancer diagnosis presented in Table 1
- Six main themes were developed from the data, they are summarised with corresponding participant quotations in Figure 1
- Long term survival with HIV led to existing mental health challenges for some : a ‘psychological accumulation’
- A range of physical side effects, skin toxicity had biggest impact
- Anal cancer treatment could exacerbate social isolation & impact on sexual relationships
- People adopted their own coping strategies & resilience from previous life experiences

Participant no	Age range	Gender	HIV diagnosis	Anal Cancer diagnosis
1	65-70yrs	M	1981	2018
2	60-65yrs	M	1989	2021
3	65-70yrs	M	1989	2020
4	60-65yrs	M	1994	2021
5	55-60yrs	M	1996	2021
6	60-65yrs	M	1981	2018
7	55-60yrs	M	1986	2021
8	50-55yrs	M	Not known	2021

Table 1 Participant demographics & timing of diagnoses

## CONCLUSIONS

- This single centre study provided rich and in-depth qualitative data about experiences & challenges of an under-served population
- It forms an important basis for future research , informing the identification of future interventions
- It led to the establishment of a first of its kind support group hosted by Maggie’s Centre, West London
- This work will be taken forward in an NIHR funded research project starting later in 2024



Figure 1 Summary of main themes developed



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