Knowledge of STIs and HIV among people with and without HIV: where are we now?

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Background
Poor knowledge of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV among people living with HIV (PWH) could result in a worsening in quality of life. We aimed to investigate the knowledge of STIs prevention, transmission and awareness regarding with HIV and the U=U campaign, among PWH compared to people without HIV (PWOH).

Materials and Methods
We proposed a questionnaire regarding STIs and HIV to PWH attending eight outpatient clinics for Infectious Diseases in Italy. The same questionnaire was administered to PWOH. We collected demographic data, and matched participants 1:2 by age, gender, and level of education.

We assigned 1 point to correct, 0.5 point to partially correct, and 0 point to wrong answers.

Additional questions regarding disclosure and U=U campaign were proposed to PWH.

Differences among two groups were evaluated using Student’s t test or Pearson chi-squared test, as appropriate. The statistical significance level was established as p < 0.05.

Results
We collected 132 answers from PWH, matched to 264 PWOH. The mean age was 50.09±11.11 years. No differences were present in gender, level of education, or work status, while there was a higher percentage of homosexual and bisexual people among PWH. Overall, PWH scored better than PWOH (p=0.001). Furthermore, PWH answered significantly better about the route of transmission of HIV (p=0.018) and STIs (p=0.003), the risk of transmission of HIV living with a PWH (p<0.001), and the U=U campaign (p=0.001), while PWOH scored significantly better regarding contraceptive pill as an effective barrier for transmission (p=0.016) (Figure 1).

Regarding HIV-status disclosure, 88/132(66.7%) declared it to the general practitioner; reasons for non-disclosure were no need, fear of judgment, and lack of trust. Moreover, 109/132(82.6%) disclosed their status to family, friends, or partners. In this case, fear to be avoided, judged, and no need were reasons for non-disclosure. Of note, 58/132(43.9%) declared U=U has changed their self-perceptions, bringing back freedom, self-confidence, and “normality”.

Conclusions
PWH showed a better knowledge about STIs than PWOH. However, several gaps regarding these topics and U=U campaign still need to be addressed among both populations. Also, more effort is needed to reduce stigma and self-stigma.

References