



Canadian Nursing Students' Association Association des étudiant(e)s infirmier(ère)s du Canada

Affordable and Accessible PrEP For All

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Introduction/Background Information

HIV is a syndrome caused by a virus called the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It attacks the body's immune system by hijacking white blood cells, leaving people vulnerable to secondary infections. Without treatment, an HIV infection will lead to a more severe syndrome called AIDS. There is currently no cure or vaccine for HIV, but with the right treatment and behavioural intervention, someone with HIV can expect to live a long life (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange [CATIE], 2018).

In February 2016, Health Canada approved the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to help prevent the contraction of HIV (CATIE, n.d). Using PrEP has been shown to be up to 92% effective at preventing new HIV infections in adults who are at high risk when used in conjunction with behavioural interventions (CATIE, 2018). Despite the efficiency of PrEP, rates of HIV infection in Canada have recently been on the rise. These rates were on the decline from the 1980s until 2014. Since 2014, there has been a 5% increase of HIV infections in Canada, representing just under 3000 new cases (Government of Canada, 2016). In Saskatchewan, rates of HIV diagnoses are 2.4 times higher than the rest of Canada (HIV Prevention and Control Report, 2017).

HIV disproportionately affects equity-seeking populations. Indigenous populations are 2.7 times more likely to be affected than non-Indigenous populations. People who use injection drugs are 59 times more likely to be affected than people who do not inject drugs (Government of Canada, 2016). LGBTQ2S+ men and trans women are 131 times more likely to be affected than heterosexual men (Government of Canada, 2016).

Stigma surrounding HIV and the people who are at an increased risk of getting HIV affects the availability of PrEP. Some care providers refuse to explore PrEP as an option due to concerns about the individual's ability to adhere to the behavioural interventions used in tandem with PrEP (Staples, Sanyal, Khatura, Mishra & Kumar, 2015). These care providers assume that the idea of PrEP will encourage high-risk individuals to develop a false sense of security leading to increased risk-taking behaviours, promiscuity, decreased screening, and decreased use of protective measures. However, there is no evidence to support these assumptions (Staples et al., 2015). Societal perceptions impact the quality of care these individuals receive. There is currently a lack of knowledge surrounding PrEP and addressing social prejudices may be vital in expanding its use (Knight, Small, Carson, & Shoveller, 2016). Low adoption rates, use of PrEP, and the high costs for clients reflect that market access of PrEP is significantly driven by strong prevailing societal views despite regulatory approvals and national recommendations supported by clinical

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evidence (Staples et al., 2015).

The Position

The CNSA believes that it is imperative that all individuals have the right and ability to access PrEP. As an organization, CNSA supports equitable health care for equity-seeking populations and takes into account social inequalities. CNSA supports the notion that PrEP should be affordable and supports incorporating it into routine HIV prevention and treatment strategies, free of cost to the individual.

The CNSA aspires to influence and to advance innovation and social justice in the nursing curriculum and the nursing profession. The CNSA also has a core mandate to be the primary resource for nursing students. Therefore, the CNSA supports the education of nursing students regarding PrEP use, access, and the health inequities that can prevent appropriate PrEP usage- such as perceived risk, lack of support, lack of healthcare access, and the social determinants of health. Advocacy for this education may improve health promotion and health outcomes for populations that are disproportionately affected by health inequities.

The CNSA stands in support of The Canadian Association of Nurses in HIV/AIDS Care (CANAC) in its commitment to fostering excellent HIV/AIDS care in nursing and for the prevention of the spread of HIV (CANAC, 2018). The CNSA works in tandem with organizations on the point of care to support equity seeking populations in receiving PrEP. As future health care providers, we as nurses must recognize the complex and dynamic knowledge around HIV prevention and care.

Relation To Canadian Nursing School Curriculums

According to Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) it is essential for nursing programs to prepare their students so that they understand primary health care in regard to health disparities, equity-seeking populations, and the social determinants of health (CASN, 2015). Many equity-seeking populations such as people who use injection drugs, Indigenous people and LGBTQ2S+ individuals are at a higher risk of contracting HIV. Nurses have a responsibility to support all patients throughout their healthcare journey and to advocate for the reduction of barriers to accessing healthcare.

There are currently several barriers individuals must overcome to access PrEP. CASN (2015) states that nurses must possess the ability to counsel and to educate clients to promote health, prevent disease, and manage symptoms. When nurses are uneducated about the benefits of PrEP as a successful tool for preventing and treating HIV, they cannot adequately support their clients to receive the most beneficial care.

CNSA must advocate for the inclusion of HIV education surrounding prevention and disease management at all levels; primordial, primary, secondary and tertiary, quaternary. The integration of this education will allow nursing students to be leaders in health promotion. The inclusion of this curriculum would also allow for knowledge expansion and better awareness about the evidence-informed practice of disease prevention.

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Conclusion

The CNSA believes that (PrEP) should be available and affordable for equity-seeking populations across Canada. The CNSA as an organization will continue to advocate for equitable health care for these individuals, provide resources to nursing students on the topic of HIV/AIDS, and engage in research about HIV prevention and treatment.

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