

Respect Portugal: Knowledge, attitudes and practices of health care professionals in primary care centers about HIV and vulnerable populations and its implications on testing

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Background

HIV incidence in Portugal is high and 50% of new diagnoses are late presenters. HIV treatment is exclusively offered in Hospitals, so **Health Care Professionals (HCP) in Primary Care Centers (PCC)** have little contact with people living with HIV (PLHIV) and rapid tests revealed poor acceptance.

Respect Portugal was part of Work Package 7 of OptTEST, intends to **identify barriers associated with stigma and discrimination to HIV screening in PCC, and develop strategies to overcome those barriers.**

Methods

Respect is a **research/action project** developed in 3 PCC in high HIV prevalence regions (Amadora, Cascais and Loures/Odivelas), between 2016 and 2019, based on an Ukraine questionnaire that **evaluates knowledge, attitudes, practices and screening regarding HIV and PLHIV.**

The questionnaire was self-completed by a sampling of HCP from the 3 PCC in 2016 (Phase 1) and 2018 (Phase 3). In between, each PCC developed strategies to overcome the barriers identified in Questionnaire (Phase 2).

Results

■ There were **167** respondents in phase 1 and **192** in phase 3, equally distributed by the 3 PCC, and with similar distribution regarding sex (84%/84% female), age (63%/57% over 40 years) and profession (51%/49% doctors; 44%/47% nurses).

■ In Phase 2 all PCC developed **training sessions to HCP**, but with different methodologies and range (*fig. 1*).

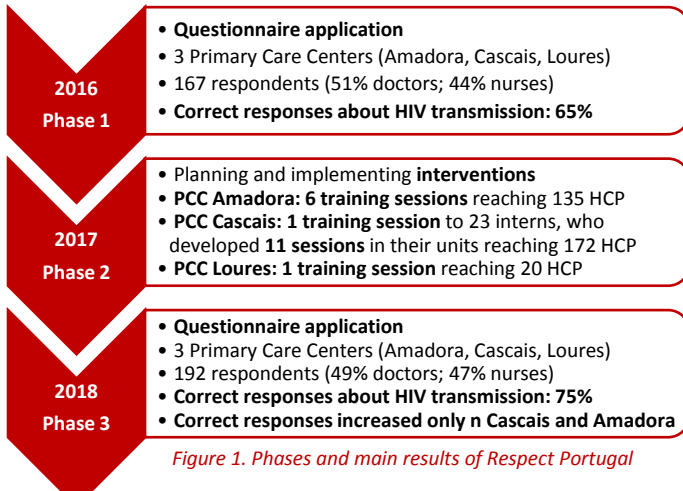


Figure 1. Phases and main results of Respect Portugal

■ **Knowledge about HIV transmission** was low in phase 1 (average **65%** of correct responses), increasing to **75%** in phase 2 (only in Amadora and Cascais).

■ Lower knowledge is associated with **overvaluation of risk transmission and discriminatory attitudes and practices.**

■ **Routine screening** reported is low (**under 50%** even in **vulnerable populations**) except for pregnant women. In phase 2 **universal screening** reported increased from **17% to 32%**.

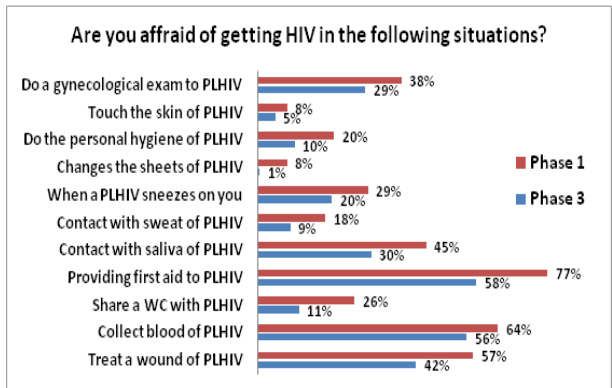


Figure 2. % of HCP that reported to fear getting HIV in different situations

Conclusion

HCP in PCC in Portugal seems to have **insufficient knowledge about HIV**, resulting in **high risk perception** of occupational transmission and **discriminatory practices**. This aspects improve significantly thru **training** (either external or internal), as long as it reaches a **significant number of professionals.**

Screening is low, even in vulnerable populations. Although universal screening increased a little after training, it seems there are **other obstacles to testing**, like lack of knowledge about existing norms and unclear procedures regarding rapid tests, which must be addressed.