

Possible discrimination towards people living with chronic hepatitis B in Thailand (B-Kap)?

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Abstract:

Background & Aims

In Thailand, hepatitis B virus (HBV) universal immunization started in 1992 but up to 7% of adults born before 1992 are chronically infected. Healthcare workers (HCWs) knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding HBV in Thailand are not well known.

Methods

B-Kap was a cross-sectional survey sent to 207 HCWs at maternity or pediatric wards of 17 hospitals across Thailand. The questionnaire was computerized and questions about knowledge, attitudes and practices derived from a literature review.

Results

129 HCWs (62%) returned completed and valid questionnaires. 85% were female and median age was 48 years (interquartile range: 40-52). 48% were nurses, midwives or counselors, 22% obstetricians, pediatricians or internists, 16% medical technologists and 14% pharmacists. 66% had more than 20 years of experience and 76% had received a training on HBV.

98% HCWs answered correctly to at least half of the questions assessing HBV knowledge and 80% at least two thirds. 90% considered HBV as a major public health concern and 81% showed compassion and desire to help. 41% and 36% believed that chronic hepatitis B may significantly affect physical and social/mental quality of life, respectively. 24% reported wearing double gloves with HBV-infected patients. 38% believed that HBV-infected people are stigmatized. 23% thought that some colleagues try to avoid dealing with such patients and 50% recently saw a colleague talking negatively about them. Most HCWs seemed to have adequate practices in terms of information provided to pregnant women on vaccination birth dose, need for immunoglobulin and advice for long-term follow-up.

Conclusion

Most HCWs had basic knowledge on HBV and generally adequate practices. However, the survey raised the problem of possible rampant discrimination, which is not currently recognized as a potential problem in Thailand at a time of increased awareness about the need for treatment to prevent hepatic complications.