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## **Sexual health charity launches guide to improve HIV diagnosis in primary care**

It is time for healthcare professionals to consider routine HIV testing when considering a diagnosis or as part of new patient checks, says the Medical Foundation of AIDS & Sexual Health (MedFASH)<sup>1</sup> today (Thursday 19 May).

With over a quarter of people with HIV in the UK still going undiagnosed<sup>2</sup>, MedFASH has issued a revised and updated edition of its popular booklet *HIV in Primary Care*<sup>3</sup> to help GPs, practice nurses and other members of the primary healthcare team to improve rates of HIV diagnosis in primary care, and also to provide high quality care for their patients diagnosed with HIV.

This is in line with the *UK National Guidelines for HIV Testing 2008*<sup>4</sup>, which recommend the routine offer of HIV testing for patients with certain conditions or risk factors and in areas where HIV prevalence is high. GPs also need to make their services accessible to patients with HIV by reassuring them about confidentiality in their practices and by making links with local HIV specialist units, says the charity.

Late diagnosis severely affects health outcomes for people with HIV. On average each year, three fifths of people who die from HIV infection were diagnosed late - that is after the point their treatment should have begun<sup>5</sup>. Delayed diagnosis also increases the chances of onward transmission because effective treatments can reduce the risk of the infection being passed on to a partner by up to 96%<sup>6</sup>.

Ruth Lowbury, Chief Executive of MedFASH, said today: "With research indicating that HIV treatment dramatically reduces the chances of an infected person passing on the virus, getting more people on treatment early will have enormous benefits both for those individuals and for public health. But for that to happen, HIV testing needs to be offered much more routinely than it is at the moment."

Dr Philippa Matthews, a GP from King's Cross and one of the co-authors of the booklet, also said: "We need to get the message out that there is nothing special or difficult about HIV testing, it doesn't require extra training or unique counselling skills. This booklet offers practical help to primary care professionals about when to consider testing for HIV and how to talk to patients about it."

As well as covering testing, the booklet also offers up-to-date information on primary healthcare for patients with HIV, covering day-to-day issues such as contraception, immunisation and cervical screening as well as side-effects of HIV antiretroviral drugs and potential drug interactions. With hospital HIV budgets under pressure, GPs who have traditionally not had much contact with patients with HIV may well start seeing more of them in their surgeries for non-HIV-related problems.

Dr Surinder Singh, a GP from Deptford in London and co-author of the booklet, said: "With the move toward shared care models for people with long-term conditions, GPs will undoubtedly find themselves dealing with people with HIV. In fact it is no more difficult than managing patients with diabetes. The essential element is trust. Ensuring that patients feel confident to disclose their positive HIV status is key, and we hope this booklet will give GPs the information they need to feel confident to provide primary care for HIV-positive patients. Remember that the local HIV specialist unit is available to answer questions from GPs."

Over 25,000 copies of the first edition of *HIV in Primary Care* have been distributed since its launch in 2004 and it has received excellent feedback from users. Copies can be obtained from MedFASH at £10 per copy at [enquiries@medfash.bma.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@medfash.bma.org.uk), or it can be downloaded free of charge at [www.medfash.org.uk](http://www.medfash.org.uk).

## Ends

### Notes to editors:

1. The Medical Foundation for AIDS & Sexual Health is an independent charity originally founded by the British Medical Association to promote excellence in the field of HIV and sexual health.

2. It is estimated that there were 86 500 people in the UK living with HIV at the end of 2009 of whom 26% were undiagnosed. In 2009 there were 6 630 new diagnoses of HIV in the UK. More information on HIV epidemiology can be found on the Health Protection Agency website <http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&Page&HPAwebAutoListName/Page/1200660065903?p=1200660065903>

3. *HIV in Primary Care: an essential guide for GPs, practice nurses and other members of the primary healthcare team* by Dr Sara Madge, Dr Philippa Matthews, Dr Surinder Singh and Dr Nick Theobald. Drs Matthews and Singh are practicing GPs, Drs Madge and Theobald are HIV specialists with a background in general practice. All the authors are involved in GP education. The booklet can be downloaded at [www.medfash.org.uk](http://www.medfash.org.uk)

4. British Association for Sexual Health and HIV, British HIV Association, British Infection Society (2008) *UK National Guidelines for HIV Testing 2008*. Available at [www.bhiva.org](http://www.bhiva.org) and [www.bashh.org](http://www.bashh.org)

5. Health Protection Agency press release, 23 March 2011. *UK-acquired HIV nearly doubles in ten years*. [http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb\\_C/1296683749074](http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1296683749074)

6. See aidsmap report, 12 May 2011, *Treatment as prevention works: randomised study shuts 3 years early after showing 96% reduction in risk of transmission* on HPTN 052, a large, international study which randomised 1736 male-female couples in which one partner was HIV-positive either to begin antiretroviral therapy immediately, or to wait until treatment was clinically indicated. <http://www.aidsmap.com/Treatment-as-prevention-works-randomised-study-shuts-3-years-early-after-showing-96-reduction-in-risk-of-transmission/page/1796327/>

### PRESS CONTACT DETAILS

To speak to Ruth Lowbury, MedFASH Chief Executive or the booklet's authors: [rlowbury@medfash.bma.org.uk](mailto:rlowbury@medfash.bma.org.uk) or 020 7383 6345 (8.30am to 4pm)