

Researchers urge earlier HIV testing

December 4 2013

Last week, to coincide with World Aids Day and National HIV Testing Week, a series of mobile clinics around the region offered help and advice to raise awareness of the importance of early testing for HIV.

Staff from the Faculty of Health and Social Care and the Centre for Health and Social Care Research at Canterbury Christ Church University joined one of the mobile units in the Wincheap Commercial Centre to offer encouragement on what proved to be a bitterly cold day for those working in the outreach teams.

Faculty staff together with the Sydney De Haan Centre for Arts and Health at the University, and clinical colleagues from Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, Kent Community Health NHS Trust, Medway Foundation NHS Trust, and East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust are working on the IMPRESS Health 2 Project.

The project aims to identify local factors behind the delay in HIV diagnosis, and implement strategies to encourage earlier HIV testing, so people who [test](#) positive can receive the full benefits of modern anti-retroviral treatment and care.

Also in collaboration with the University Hospital of Amiens and the University of Picardie in northern France, the project will involve the interviewing of approximately 100 NHS staff and patients in Kent and Medway between now and the early spring of 2014.

Dr Mun-Yee Tung, Consultant Physician in Genitourinary Medicine and

HIV infection at Kent Community Health NHS Trust, and a partner in the IMPRESS Health 2 study, reiterated the importance of early diagnosis: She said: "Early HIV testing improves outcomes for individuals and their long-term [health](#), enabling necessary treatment to be started before their immune system has become too compromised. Earlier HIV testing allows them to access appropriate care which is tailored to their individual needs much sooner. However, we need to understand the barriers that have to be overcome to ensure that there is equal access to HIV testing regardless of where an individual lives in the region or the cause of their infection.

"HIV testing is now more widely accessible than ever before, and can be done by a simple blood test at their GP surgery if they prefer not to go to a Sexual Health Clinic. Undiagnosed HIV infection jeopardises the health of the patient and potentially their loved ones. Earlier HIV testing saves lives."

Approximately 100,000 people are HIV positive in the UK, but recent information released by Public Health England highlighted that 20% (1 in 5) of those infected with the virus do not know that they are HIV positive because they have not been tested and could therefore go on to infect others without realising it.

In 2012, 118 people were newly diagnosed with HIV in Kent and Medway, 58% of which were diagnosed at a late stage.

Provided by Canterbury Christ Church University

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