

Heterosexuals in Kent become the highest group diagnosed with HIV

November 21 2014, by Holly Finch

Findings of a recent international research project, undertaken by academics at Christ Church University, show that more heterosexuals, both men and women, are diagnosed with HIV than men who have sex with men.

The study also discovered that heterosexuals were also being diagnosed much later than other groups. This is suggested to be due to outdated assumptions that the 'traditional carriers' are [homosexual men](#), intravenous drug users and bisexuals, leading to HIV being initially ruled out as possibility of illness.

More generally over half of the people testing HIV positive in Kent and Medway are diagnosed with the disease at a late stage.

The project, IMPRESS Health 2 Phase one: Understanding factors behind the late testing and diagnosis of HIV, led by Dr Stephen O'Connor, Reader in Cancer, Palliative and End of Life Care, aims to design and test new ways to improve rates of earlier diagnosis to prevent further spreading of the disease as well as lowering mortality rates.

Dr Stephen O'Connor, said: "The variety of people affected by HIV has changed dramatically since the virus first appeared.

"More worrying is the fact that [heterosexuals](#), both male and female, are more likely to be diagnosed later with HIV than members of the better informed gay community, often because they, and many healthcare

professionals, still associate HIV with gay [men](#), intravenous drug users and sex workers.

"The study showed that GPs sometimes fail to consider HIV as a possible cause for HIV related health problems and positively discourage some from having an HIV test at the appropriate time because of these outdated and misinformed assumptions."

The projects concerning findings has kick started a campaign, It's Better to Know, in collaboration with Kent County Council (KCC), Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, Medway NHS Foundation Trust and Kent Community Health NHS Trust.

The campaign aims to raise awareness about HIV and increase the uptake of HIV testing by outlining the devastating facts of the disease, as well as highlighting the benefits of being diagnosed early.

The projects findings concluded phase one of European funded project IMPRESS Health 2, and Dr O'Connor is already preparing for phase two.

Provided by Canterbury Christ Church University

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