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***The nursing personnel attitudes towards an HIV positive patient***

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**Postawy personelu pielęgniarskiego wobec pacjenta zakażanego wirusem HIV**

The acronym HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. The virus was first described in 1983. There are two known strains of HIV: HIV-1 and HIV-2.

HIV infection leads to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

First cases of AIDS were described in the US after 1980. In Poland the first AIDS case was recognized in 1986. According to the data of the National AIDS Centre there were about 40 million HIV positive people around the world in the year 2000 and 7038 registered HIV carriers in Poland. The number of HIV positive people and those with fully blown-up AIDS is bound to increase, with many people unaware of their disease.

People aged less than 40 get infected most frequently. HIV/AIDS patients are, as a rule treated in the infectious wards, but due to coexisting diseases or emergencies (e.g. trauma) they may be admitted to the ED or ICU or may need urgent surgery.

Nurses are the biggest group in the therapeutic team and they tend to get involved in the patient care at the earliest. Certainly, HIV positive patient makes nurses a little apprehensive and afraid of eventually losing their life.

We wanted to assess the attitudes of nurses towards a HIV positive patient.

#### MATERIAL AND METHODS

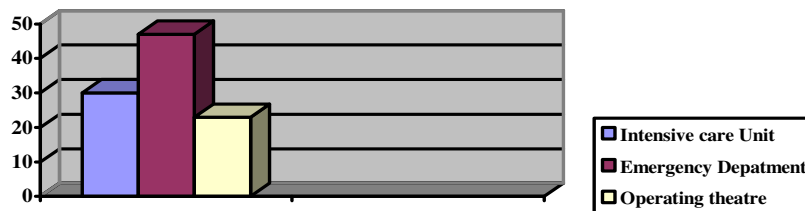
The survey was conducted between June and September 2004 among 100 nurses. 47 of them were employed in the ED, 30 in the ICU and the remaining 23 were recruited from the operating room staff. The mean age of nurses was 37 years and 3 months. The youngest nurse was 23 and the oldest one was 34. 75% of nurses were aged between 23 and 43.

#### RESULTS

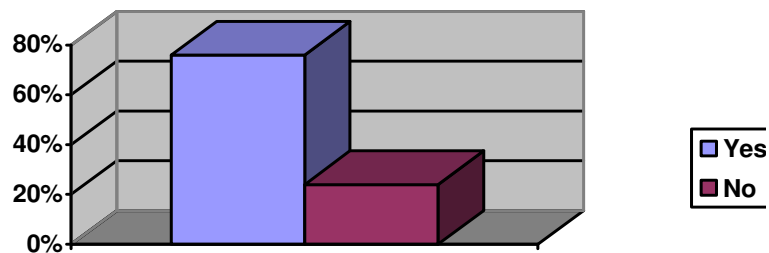
According to the answers to our questionnaire 76% of nurses worked with HIV positive patients whereas 24% never cared for them. 67% of nurses were afraid of eventually losing their life while caring for a patient with AIDS, 30% were sympathetic towards such patients and 3% felt hostile towards them.

20% of nurses declare that they treat every patient as if he was HIV positive, 51% treat the patients on the individual basis and 23% don't give it a thought if somebody is infected or not.

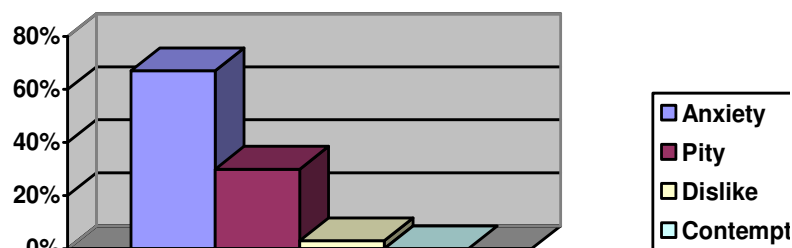
96% of inquired nurses claim that they use strict antiseptic regime while caring for a HIV positive patient. 93% is afraid of getting HIV infected. 11% of nurses states that they would be able to work with HIV/AIDS patients, 41% would refuse working with them and 48% never gave it a thought.



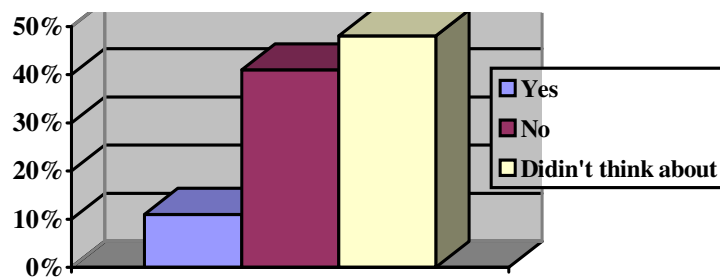
**Pic. 1. Wards in which surveyed nurses were employed**



**Pic. 2. Number of people that encountered a patient with AIDS**



**Pic. 3. Feelings of towards HIV positive patient**



**Pic. 4. Willingness to work with a patient with AIDS**

## DISCUSSION

Stereotype that HIV/AIDS is a problem of homosexuals and drug addicts was at the root of considerable bias and a lack of understanding in the society. Being hostile towards a HIV positive person is not uncommon among health care workers. Nurses are the biggest personnel group in a hospital ward. A nurse spends with a patient more time than anyone else, taking care of him, fulfilling doctor's orders, taking part in diagnostic procedures and teaching the patient self-care.

The personnel of EDs, ICUs and operating rooms is faced with HIV virus much more often than others, presumably due to both wide spectrum of patients treated there and frequency of emergency procedures performed in the life-threatening situations (e.g. CPR). In the investigated group of nurses, 67% of them were scared of losing their life having learnt that they were caring for a HIV positive patient, 30% stated that they felt sympathetic towards him. Only 3% felt hostile to these patients – a finding that is in contrast with other studies on this issue.

20% of the surveyed nursing staff declared that they treat every patient as if he was HIV positive, whereas 51% claimed that they didn't do so.

There is statistically significant correlation between the fear of getting HIV infected and employing strict antiseptic regime in the work place.

93% of responders is afraid of getting infected which may indicate that they are not familiar with the techniques and guidelines of infection control and prevention. At the same time 82% of surveyed nurses is against the isolation of HIV positive patients.

There is a weak statistical correlation between age and declared knowledge about the disease. The older the nurse the more knowledge she claims to have about the HIV infection.

84% of nurses stated that they would allow their children to go school with HIV positive child which is in stark contrast with other studies.

51% inquired nurses treat HIV positive patients with extreme caution which may mean that they are afraid of losing their health and eventually their life.

Questioned if they would be willing to care for a HIV positive patient in the hospital setting only 11% answered they would, which is somehow in contrast with the previous declarations about their thorough knowledge about HIV.

The most willing nurses were those working in the ICU. No statistically significant correlation was found between the type of ward the nurses worked in and the way they would treat the HIV positive patient.

82% of enquired nurses is not for isolation of HIV positive patients.

51% of surveyed nurses treat infected patients with caution, 41% treat all the patients in the same way and 8% dealing with such patients limits only to fulfilling doctor's orders.

84% wouldn't mind if their child went to school with a HIV positive child.

26% of nurses are positive that people with HIV/AIDS are to blame for their disease.

## CONCLUSIONS

- ⇒ The nursing personnel shows positive attitude towards HIV positive patients.
- ⇒ There seems to be the need for nursing training courses on safe care of an HIV positive patient.

## LITERATURE

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## STRESZCZENIE

Zakażenie wirusem HIV wywołuje ostry nabyty niedobór odporności AIDS. Pierwsze przypadki nieznaney choroby, zostały zauważone na przełomie 1980-1981 roku. Początkowo uważano, że dotyczy ona wyłącznie homoseksualistów. W niedługim czasie okazało się, że na AIDS chorują również narkomani, prostytutki, osoby chore na hemofilię, fakt, że narkomani i homoseksualiści należą do grup historycznie stygmatyzowanych spowodował negatywną ocenę wszystkich zakażonych wirusem HIV. Istnieje pewien stereotyp chorego na AIDS. Ludzie zdrowi często dyskryminują tych chorych, uważając, że ich samych to nie dotyczy co powoduje izolację chorych zakażonych wirusem HIV, a także ukrywanie swojej choroby stwarzając zagrożenie dla otoczenia w szczególności dla personelu służby zdrowia.

Celem pracy jest ocena postaw pielęgniarek wobec pacjenta zakażonego wirusem HIV. Badania przeprowadzone były wśród 100 pielęgniarek w Klinicznym Oddziale Ratunkowym, Anestezjologii i Intensywnej Terapii oraz pielęgniarek operacyjnych w Szpitalu Klinicznym w Gdańsku. Do badania zastosowano kwestionariusz ankiety, której arkusz jest narzędziem własny

## SUMMARY

The HIV infection is the cause of AIDS. The first cases of the unknown, at that time, disease were reported in the late 1980. At first disease was believed to be limited only to the homosexuals. But after a short time it was clear that AIDS could also be diagnosed in drug addicts, prostitutes and hemophiliac. Given the fact that both drug addicts and homosexuals are the historically stigmatized groups, surprising it is not that all infected people are perceived in a negative way. There is a stereotype of a person with AIDS. HIV positive people are often discriminated by the healthy ones and that leads to their isolation and concealing their disease, which in turn poses a great risk to the society and especially to the medical personnel.

The goal of this study was to evaluate the nurses' attitudes towards an HIV positive patient. The study was conducted among one hundred nurses working in the university hospital in Gdansk. The questionnaire was designed by the authors.