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Psychological and practical management of neurocognitive impairments in people living with HIV

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With recent decline in HIV associated severe neurocognitive impairments in the era of combined ARTs, the focus has now moved to 'Mild Cognitive Disorder' (MND) defined by mild to moderate impairment in at least two cognitive domains (e.g., processing speed, memory (short/long term), executive function, language). MND is not progressive and a significant proportion of individuals improve neurocognitively if given the right interventions (psychological therapy, compensatory strategies, and neurocognitive rehabilitation).

With the aging HIV population, we are likely to see an increase in MND. Additionally, HIV positive individuals experience significantly higher rates of mental health problems than the general population. Unmanaged mental health problems can decrease adherence to ART and increase substance abuse, both have effects on cognitive function. Managing mental health problems and cognitive impairments in patients increase ARV adherence rates and have a positive impact on health outcomes. As there is no first line medical treatment to manage neurocognitive impairments, it is imperative that patients receive appropriate psychological and neuropsychological treatments. At the Royal Free Hospital in London, we offer a Neurocognitive Screening Service for patients with HIV reporting mild to moderate cognitive difficulties. The

recommendations following a screen includes (a) retesting in a year to chart cognitive performance over time, (b) referral to neurology for neuro-rehabilitation if significant deficits are identified, (c) treatment of drug and alcohol misuse (d) medication review if ARVs are thought to be contributing and (e) offering psychological intervention to treat mood problems and/or symptom management that may be contributing to the presentation of MND. The talk I am interested in presenting at the conference is on the psychological and practical management of neurocognitive impairments in the HIV population. I recently presented this talk in the BHIVA Autumn Conference in 2018 and received a lot of positive comments and feedback from the medical professionals that attended.

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