

LONG-ACTING TREATMENTS: PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS AND ATTENDING PHYSICIANS' PREPAREDNESS. ARE WE READY TO MANAGE IT?

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Introduction

Antiretroviral treatment is evolving towards new approach for a long life smart management of HIV infection. Recently a randomized clinical trial confirmed tolerability and efficacy of bi-monthly injectable combination of cabotegravir and rilpivirine. Long acting injectable drugs are not so far from extensive clinical use and the spread of this new therapeutic strategy could represent, at the same time, an answer for some needs of the patients (stigma, adherence, treatment fatigue), but a big challenge for the national health system.

Available studies about long-acting drugs were limited to evaluated patients' related outcomes (PROs). However, there is a need to know what the patients think about these revolutionary drugs.

The aim of this multicenter cross-sectional study was to evaluate the expectations of the patients about long-acting antiretroviral agents and how they would like to receive them.

Study Design and methods

- We carried out an anonymous online survey through Google modules, asking HIV positive people to judge their relationship with daily antiretroviral therapy (ART) and to give their opinion about long-acting drugs. The survey was open for compilation during a week in June 2020. The patients were invited to linked to the survey by whatsapp or other social messages or during the visit. The median time spent to complete the survey was < 2 minutes.
- 26 little and large clinical centre and some patients organizations were involved along our country with the aim to have a representative picture of the opinion of the Italian patients (fig.1).
- We also collected data about the age of the patients, the centre where they are followed, time passed since the diagnosis and their compliance.

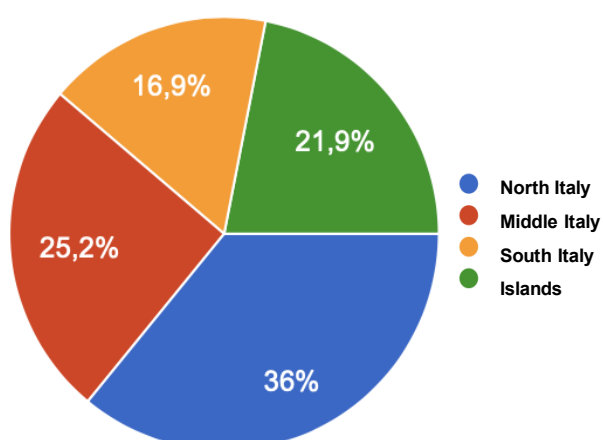


Figure 1. This figure shows the geographical distribution of the people answering the survey

Results

- We collected data about 242 patients, 58 females (24.0%), 182 males (75.2%) and 2 transgenders (0.8%), with an age ranging from 18 to 69 years. Age distribution is reported in fig 2.

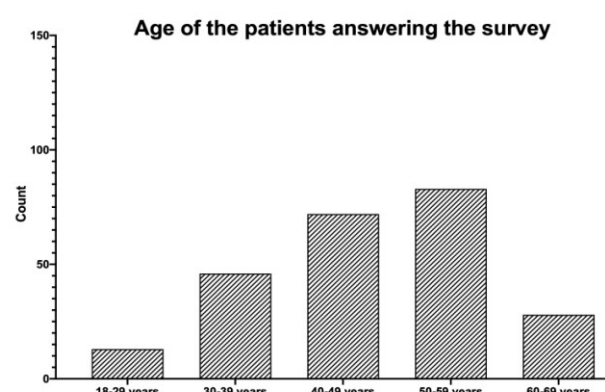


Figure 2. This figure shows the age distribution of the people answering our survey. It can be seen that the majority of the patients belongs to the 50-59 age range;

- 58% of the enrolled patients were infected from more than 10 years. More than half was taking a single tablet antiretroviral regimen (fig. 3), 48% reported suboptimal adherence during the last year (more than half of them reported 3 or more missing dose/year)

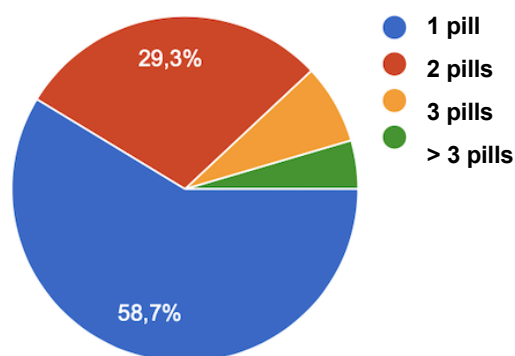


Figure 3. Antiretroviral pills burden reported from people answering the survey.

- The majority of the interviewed patients (81.8%) have a good relationship with ART; however, 33.6% of them considers daily ART an obligation and a restriction to their freedom. 143 patients (59.1%) knew about long-acting before this interview, and 215 patients (88.8%) are interested in these new drugs (fig.4).

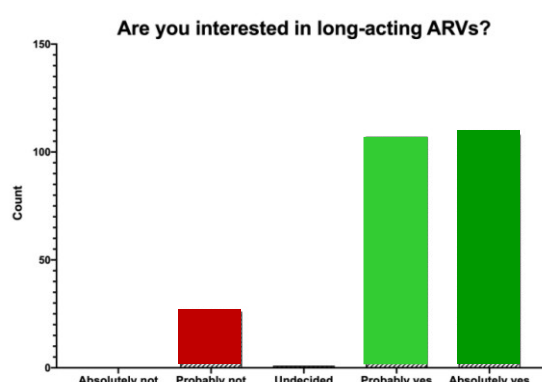


Figure 4. Interest about long-acting ARVs reported from people answering the survey.

- Moreover, 156 patients (64.5%) states that their interest would not decrease even though the drugs would be administered only at HIV outpatient clinics.

If long-acting ARVs would be administered only at the hospital, would your interest decrease?

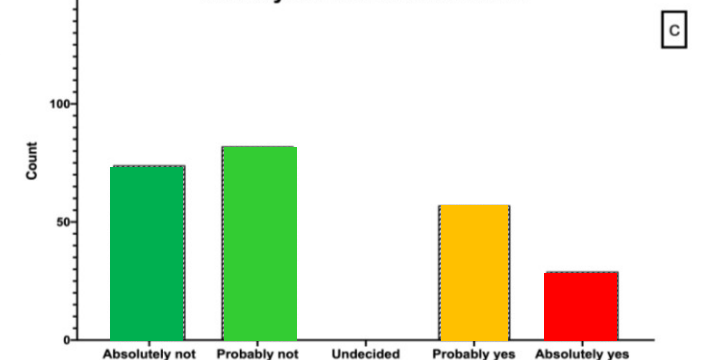


Figure 5. Interest about in-hospital long-acting ARVs administration reported from people answering the survey.

- Finally the majority of the interviewed patients (57.9%) would rather receive the intramuscular injection at their home.

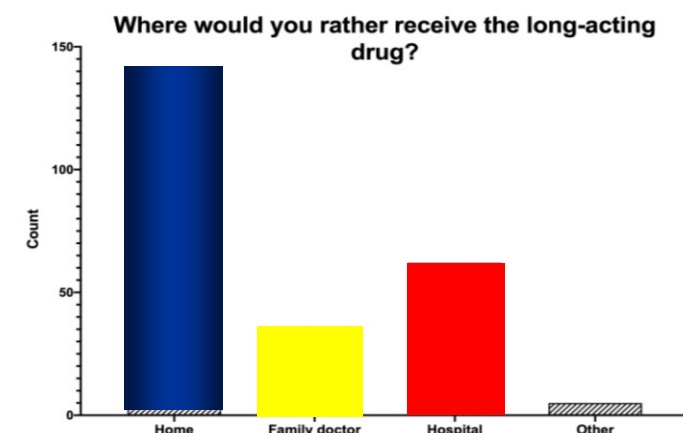


Figure 6. Interest about preferred site of long-acting ARVs administration reported from people answering the survey.

Conclusion

- The data emerging from our survey reveal that around 90% of the answering patients are interested in changing their actual treatment with a long acting one. We were surprised to find out that a so high number of subject taking a single tablet regimen are ready to change their tablets with a series of injections.
- Actually, we can estimate that in Italy 150,000 patients are on ART. **If we assume that only a quarter of the patients showing a so high interest in this new formulation could be treated, it would be necessary to rethink the organization of the outpatient unit or identify alternative methods to manage a so high daily number of injections.**
- Moreover, for the first time to our knowledge, a so high number of patients showed an enthusiastic response to the new opportunity to be treated directly at home.
- The introduction of these new drugs could be revolutionary and represent another step towards life and treatment simplification for people living with HIV infection.