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Vujovic, Olga, Koehler, Nicole, Dendle, Claire and McMenamin, Christine 2012, Australian interns' knowledge of hepatitis A, B, C and HIV and occupational exposures, *in ASHM 2012 : Proceedings of the Australian Society for HIV Medicine 2012 annual conference*, Australasian Society for HIV Medicine, Sydney, N. S. W., pp. 280-281.

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AUSTRALIAN INTERNS' KNOWLEDGE OF HEPATITIS A, B, C AND HIV AND OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURES

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Introduction: Bloodborne viruses (BBVs) namely hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus and HIV may be transmitted from patients to healthcare professionals or students via occupational exposures (e.g., needlestick injuries) to blood/bodily fluids. Whilst there is a large body of international literature examining healthcare students' knowledge and experience of occupational exposures, little is known regarding Australian medical graduates' knowledge of BBVs.

Methods: Interns commencing at three major hospitals in Melbourne in 2012 were surveyed regarding their knowledge of BBVs and hepatitis A virus (as a control). Additionally, the self-reporting of occupational exposures and knowledge of post-exposure management were measured. Surveys were administered to interns during their orientation week, prior to sessions covering occupational exposure management.

Results: Seventy-nine interns participated. Accurate basic knowledge, including modes of transmission, of all viruses was confirmed. However, understanding of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) was variable. Whilst most interns (94%) were aware of the availability of PEP for HIV, awareness fell to 58% for hepatitis B, and just 17% for hepatitis A. Alarming, 37% of interns incorrectly thought that PEP is available for hepatitis C. Occupational exposures were common (40%), often not reported (39%), and frequently occurred (31%) in non-university associated settings (e.g., volunteer work).

Conclusion: Whilst interns have good general knowledge of BBVs, their risk of occupational exposure is high, and both knowledge and behaviours regarding post-exposure management fail to meet optimal standards.

Take-home messages: Hospitals should not assume that commencing interns have adequate knowledge of occupational exposure management. Future education and research needs to focus on translation of knowledge into practice and modelling/ facilitating appropriate behaviours. Finally, these data provide support for the concept of a national curriculum in infection control for students in healthcare disciplines.