

# The Psychosocial Impact of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and Related Interventions Among Heterosexual Men (HSM) and Men Who Have Sex With Men (MSM)

T. Christopher Mast,<sup>1</sup> Carla Demuro-Mercon,<sup>2</sup> Art Granger,<sup>2</sup> Stephen Goldstone<sup>3,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Merck Research Laboratories, North Wales, PA; <sup>2</sup>RTI Health Solutions, NC; <sup>3</sup>Laser Surgery Care, NY, NY; <sup>4</sup>Mount Sinai School of Medicine, NY, NY



## Abstract

**Background:** Little data are available about the psychosocial impact of HPV-disease or related interventions, especially among men.

**Objectives:** To assess physical, social, and emotional consequences related to HPV from the male patient's perspective.

**Methods:** Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a New York City surgical practice among five groups of men (total n=31) with various HPV-related diagnoses occurring within 3 months of interview: 1) HSM with genital warts; 2) MSM with penile warts; 3) MSM with anal warts; 4) MSM with abnormal anal Pap cytology results without definitive histology; and 5) MSM diagnosed with high-grade dysplasia.

**Results:** Most HSM and MSM considered genital warts to be a "nuisance" and high levels of anxiety about transmission to a partner or starting new sexual relationships were mentioned; both groups cited recurrence as "frustrating" or "disappointing". Compared to penile warts, anal warts had a high impact among MSM that triggered lifestyle changes, fears of cancer, worries about transmission, depression, negative body image and concern about recurrence. Abnormal anal Paps had limited impact on body image or daily activities but anxiety, depression or the need to limit sexual activity were dominant themes. High-grade anal dysplasia caused MSMs to feel different about themselves. One man described feeling "substantially less sexy"; another felt "I've crossed a line [into STDs] and can never go back". Most MSM reported that the follow-up procedures (eg, biopsies) were uncomfortable, embarrassing, humiliating, and sometimes painful. Both HSM and MSM reported limited knowledge about HPV.

**Conclusions:** HPV-disease and related interventions appear to cause a degree of psychosocial burden in HSM and MSM.

## Introduction

### HPV Disease and Treatment Is Complex from the Male Patient's Perspective

Procedures	Possible Outcomes
Wart Detection and Removal Treatment for Recurrence	Cryotherapy Laser therapy TCA, Podophyllin Excision
Anal Pap Smear Repeat Pap	Normal ASCUS LSIL HSIL
High Resolution Anoscopy (HRA)	Lesion Detection Biopsy
Biopsy	Normal, squamous metaplasia, AIN1, AIN2, AIN3, Invasive Cancer
Treatment for lesion	Cryotherapy, TCA, Electrocauterization, Surgery

## Introduction

### Previous Research Mostly Among Women Suggests Psychosocial Factors Related to HPV Disease

- Pap tests - Routine<sup>1</sup>
  - Embarrassment, worry, discomfort, nervousness, pain
- Pap tests - Abnormal<sup>2</sup>
  - Anxiety, worry, depression
- Colposcopies<sup>3,4</sup>
  - Anxiety, worry, depression, cognitive impairment
- Genital warts<sup>5</sup>
  - Similar to Pap-related factors, but also has impact on sexual relations

<sup>1</sup>Reelick, 1984; Crombie, 1995; <sup>2</sup>Doherty, 1991; <sup>3</sup>Filiberti, 1993; <sup>4</sup>Gath, 1995; <sup>5</sup>Maw, 1998.

## Study Objective

- To characterize the psychosocial impact of HPV-related disease and interventions among heterosexual men (HSM) and men who have sex with men (MSM)

## Methods

- Recruitment of male patients (n=31) with HPV condition or related intervention occurring within 3 months of interview
  - Two main subject groups: HSMs (6) and MSMs (25)
  - Recruited and interviewed in NYC surgical clinic from June 9 to September 11, 2003
- In-depth, one-on-one interviews with semi-structured interview guides in three diagnosed groups:
  - Genital warts
  - Abnormal anal Pap, no histology
  - High grade dysplasia
- Interviews were taped, transcribed and analyzed for dominant themes

## Patient Characteristics

	HSM n = 6	MSM n = 7	MSM n = 6	MSM n = 6	MSM n = 6
	GW	Penile Warts	Anal Warts	Ab. Anal Pap	High Grade Dysplasia
Median Age (Range)	30 (25-45)	33 (29-53)	38 (23-40)	42 (22-46)	43 (31-50)
Race, White	100%	86%	67%	100%	50%
Monogamous relationship	83%	86%	83%	83%	67%

## Dominant Themes Emerged and Were Expressed Across Male Groups

- Limited knowledge about HPV
- Impact of conditions on sexuality and partnerships
- Worries and concerns about condition
- Interest in an HPV vaccine

## Respondents Reported General Lack of Knowledge About HPV in the Community

- HSM:
  - Unsure about possibility of transmission
  - A few men did not know how they acquired warts
  - Most felt that public is uneducated about HPV
- MSM:
  - Little knowledge about warts or HPV compared with attention given to HIV
  - Feeling that getting HPV is inevitable because it is so prevalent in the gay community

## Sexuality and Partnership: HSMs

- Expressed high levels of anxiety about:
  - Transmission to partner
  - Starting a relationship
- Disclosure to partner was sometimes a concern
  - Most would not tell short-term partner
  - About half would not tell any new partner, but would be more "careful" during sexual relations (eg. wear a condom)

## Results

### Sexuality and Partnership: MSMs

- Penile warts:
  - Most MSM would not tell a casual sexual partner
- Anal warts:
  - Negative impact on body image
  - Limitations on types and frequency of sexual activity
- Abnormal anal Paps
  - Limitations sexual activity
  - Feeling "substantially less sexy"

### Sexuality and Partnerships: MSM & HSM

- MSM:
  - "You want to throw up, especially being a very visual person myself and how New York is a very perception-based city and to not be perfect in a contagious way does horrible things to my emotional state, I haven't dated anyone since November 2002, I'm afraid to because of rejection."
- HSM:
  - "At the exact moment I told her, we were being intimate. She was about to perform oral sex and I stopped her. I started to cry. I felt like a baby.... We are still close. I told her we can't have oral sex..."

### Worries and Concerns: Genital Warts

- MSM & HSM:
  - Most: "nuisance"; "there are worse things I could get"
  - Some: "unclean", "tainted", "alarmed"
  - Wart Recurrence: "frustrating" or "disappointing"
- MSM: Anal warts had a higher impact than penile warts:
  - Triggered lifestyle changes
  - Fears of cancer
  - Depression
  - Concern about recurrence

### Worries and Concerns: Abnormal Anal Paps

- Limited impact reported on daily activities
- Caused anxiety and depression
- Idea expressed that HPV lesions may "flare up" like herpes
- Some concern about transmission to their partner
- Some felt it was easier to deal with HIV

### Worries and Concerns: Anal Dysplasia

- Anal dysplasia caused MSMs to feel different about themselves:
  - "I've crossed a line [into STDs] and can never go back."
- Despite general satisfaction with medical care, follow-up procedures (eg, biopsies) were:
  - Uncomfortable
  - Embarrassing
  - Humiliating
  - Sometimes painful

### Interest Expressed in an HPV Vaccine

- Most were interested in a vaccine now, but felt this was because they recently learned about HPV
- Questions raised about how the vaccine might help people if they were already infected
- MSMs expressed belief that anal Paps would still be considered important if a vaccine was available

## Conclusions

- There is a broad range of psychosocial burden associated with HPV conditions and interventions among HSMs and MSMs.
- Although many respondents were clients from a clinic that specializes in HPV diagnosis and treatment, there is a demand for more education of how HPV is acquired, transmitted, and treated.
- Interest in HPV vaccines among men could be enhanced by increasing awareness of HPV and its impact.