

Number of people with HIV in care in the Netherlands keeps increasing steadily

Stichting HIV Monitoring reports: patients get older and have higher than average risk of age-related diseases

The number of people receiving care for their HIV infection in the Netherlands is steadily increasing. This reports the Stichting HIV Monitoring (SHM) in its yearly Monitoring Report. This is not only driven by patients in care surviving to an older age, but also due to new infections occurring. For the period between June 2012 and June 2013, SHM reports around 1,100 newly diagnosed cases, which is similar to the growth that was measured during the last three years.

Of the total estimated 25,000 people infected with HIV in the Netherlands, in June 2013, 17,006 HIV-infected patients were in care at one of the 26 specialised treatment centres. The remaining estimated 30% of people infected with HIV are not yet diagnosed and probably unaware of their infection. It is likely that the latter group largely continues to fuel the epidemic. Not only is this situation harmful for the epidemic, but potentially also for the individual patient. Quite often people living with HIV are identified too late: in the last two years, approximately 4 in 10 patients already had a significantly damaged immune system or AIDS when they entered care. Late diagnosis also continues to be a driver for a much greater chance of premature death from AIDS.

Treatment of the group of HIV-infected individuals who are in care is increasingly successful. As a result, the number of older HIV-infected patients continues to increase as does the number of accompanying age-related diseases. These age-related diseases, particularly cardiovascular disease and non-AIDS-related tumours, are seen more commonly in HIV-infected patients than in the general population. Late diagnosis may also enhance the risk of these diseases because of prolonged effects of untreated HIV and the damaged immune system on other parts of the body.

"Managing the care of HIV-infected individuals is once again becoming increasingly complex and requires a broad medical knowledge," says Professor Peter Reiss, SHM Director and clinical scientist (Academic Medical Center, University of Amsterdam) researching ageing and HIV. "It is also clear that ageing in the general population is becoming an increasing burden on healthcare. Lessons learned in studying ageing in the HIV-infected population could potentially be applied to achieving healthy ageing in the general population."

SHM underlines the importance of establishing infection with HIV as early as possible. This allows individuals to receive appropriate treatment earlier. Apart from improving the short-term and long-term outcomes for the individual patient, earlier treatment may also benefit public health by contributing to a decrease in the number of new HIV infections.

Notes to editors, not for publication:

Peter Reiss, SHM Director, will present the main points and conclusions of the Monitoring Report 2013 at the 7th Netherlands Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Epidemiology, Prevention and Treatment (NCHIV 2013). NCHIV 2013 will take place on Tuesday, 19 November at the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in Amsterdam. Media are invited to attend the event (www.nchiv.org).

SHM's Monitoring Report 2013 and accompanying Dutch summary is available for download from SHM's website, www.hiv-monitoring.nl. Printed copies are also available: hiv.monitoring@amc.nl / t. 020 5664172. For further information contact: Louise Dolfin (020 5668110) or Henk Linse (06 11914040)

Stichting HIV Monitoring (SHM), the Dutch HIV monitoring foundation, contributes to furthering the knowledge on HIV and the course of the treated and untreated infection. In order to achieve this, SHM engages in activities such as collecting and processing data, and making this information available to treating physicians and researchers.

Attachment: Backgrounder