

Disclosing your HIV status to health professionals

It is highly likely that you will receive medical attention for HIV in a specialized centre like the Infectious Diseases Units in many Spanish hospitals. It is also highly likely that you will attend a Primary Care Health Clinic (CAP) not specialized in HIV to take care of your general health. This informative fact-sheet explains why it is important that you communicate to your attending physician at the CAP, dentist or, in some cases, to the pharmacist or the specialists in alternative therapies, that you live with HIV and whether you are taking anti-HIV drugs.

The CAP or attending physician

All HIV positive people need to have an attending physician. To enable this doctor to offer the most appropriate care for you, it is important that he/she knows whether you have any serious medical conditions, including HIV, or whether you are taking medicines prescribed by a specialized medical centre, such as your anti-HIV treatment. The CAP cannot refuse to treat you at the clinic due to the fact that you live with HIV or discriminate against you in any way due to your condition, sexuality, sex or life style. Many people may worry about disclosing to their attending physician that they live with HIV. Your records, which are kept by the attending physician, are confidential.

Dentists

When you visit the dentist they will request that you fill out a form describing your medical history. Here they will ask you if you are HIV positive and if you have any other diseases such as hepatitis B or C. Nevertheless, nobody is forced to declare his or her condition to the clinic.

According to the professional Spanish Dentistry organisation, a dentist may not discriminate against you for your HIV condition. Unfortunately this is not always the case. Sometimes dentists allege that they discriminate against HIV positive people to protect themselves and their other patients from HIV. Nevertheless, this is not acceptable. The standard measures of sterilization and the procedures followed to control infections are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that HIV positive patients are not a risk to staff or other patients.

Obviously, whether to declare your HIV condition or not is a very personal decision. However, disclosing to your dentist that you live with HIV can have advantages. They can be aware of certain gum problems that occur more often in people with HIV. It would also be better to tell your dentist whether you are taking any medication to treat HIV or other

infections, since he or she is able to prescribe drugs that won't conflict with yours.

If you are worried about having to explain your HIV status to your dentist, you could request that your HIV centre recommend a dentist to you. They may have their own dental specialist. Your dental records are confidential.

Pharmacists

A pharmacist may ask what drugs you are taking when you fill a prescription or when you make a purchase without a medical prescription. Some medicines without prescription, for example hay fever tablets or seasonal allergy medicine, can interact dangerously with certain anti-HIV drugs. It can be particularly difficult to maintain the confidentiality of your medical state at the pharmacy counter. In this case, if you often need drugs without a prescription, we recommend that you speak with your HIV doctor or your HIV specialist pharmacist.

Alternative therapy specialists

Many people with HIV use alternative therapies, such as acupuncture. You may want to inform them of your HIV status, but that should not imply any difference in the type of therapy that is offered to you. Nevertheless, alternative therapists are not as well regulated as traditional medical professionals. For that reason you may want to verify their confidentiality policies before revealing any health information to them.

If alternative therapies are recommended to you, check with your doctor or HIV pharmacist that the therapy is safe. Some alternative medicines, such as the anti-depressant herb St. John's Wort, can interfere with the correct functioning of some medicines. It is also possible that your alternative therapist may not know all the possible dangerous reactions that could occur with other medicines you may be taking.