

HIV-Positive Pregnant, Married Woman: Husband Not Informed of HIV Status

A 32 year old married G1P0 presents for new prenatal care after having a positive pregnancy test 2 weeks earlier. The patient was excited about pregnancy but had some concerns that she wanted to address before establishment of prenatal care. She reports that she is HIV positive. She has not yet required any therapy for her disease but reports that she has not really sought therapy.

She reports a history of two sex contacts and knows that she contracted HIV with her first partner during college. She learned that she was HIV positive during routine testing for a life insurance application. Because the test was administered as part of an insurance application, the result was not reported to public health officials. She had only shared this information with her mother and her family physician who agreed to not perform testing or bill based on this diagnosis. She was very concerned with the consequences of her family and friends knowing her disease status.

She reports that she has been married for 5 years now. She contracted HIV about 10 years ago and was tested positive 8 years prior. She has not told her husband about the diagnosis.

During the initial prenatal care visit, treatment and AZT prophylaxis was discussed with the patient as well as the benefits for prevention of vertical transmission of HIV to the fetus when the mother received this therapy. She agreed that she wanted to be treated, but did not want testing or any billing to occur with the code for HIV. She also did not want this information shared with any family member other than her mother. She wanted all phone calls concerning her condition to go to her mother and no phone messages to be left.

It was explained that she would need to be tested for HIV and followed with viral loads for optimal care. After this understanding, she agreed to the testing. An Infectious Disease consult was also arranged. The patient did have a positive Western blot for HIV. She started therapy.

As the state where testing was performed has laws mandating the reporting of HIV + status to the department of health, the hospital where the testing was completed took the steps necessary to notify the public health officials. The patient was made aware of this following her testing. She was mortified and requested that these steps not happen. However, as the state laws required, she would be contacted and an

interview arranged to determine other potential sex contacts at risk for HIV. These persons at risk would then be contacted and offered HIV testing without revealing the identity of the person who placed them at risk. However, there was one caveat, if the person was married the spouse would be notified that their spouse was tested HIV positive.

The physician in this case called the patient and explained the procedure. She wanted to tell her spouse. However, she made it known that she planned to tell him that she had tested positive and he probably gave her HIV.

She was concerned that she would lose her husband and wanted to put the diagnosis in these terms to minimize this risk.

Of course, her physician advised against this. She then told her husband and brought him to her next prenatal visit for counseling. He was counseled in generic terms without discussing how he or she may have contracted HIV. He desired testing and this was completed.

The couple returned 1 week later for the results. The husband was negative for HIV. The patient told him that it was possible that he had cleared the virus. The couple was counseled on safe sex practices for partners discordant for HIV. The patient went on to have an uneventful pregnancy with HAART therapy and an infant negative for HIV.