

**Knowledge, attitudes and practices of physicians on HIV/AIDS in Nepal**

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## **Abstract**

HIV/AIDS is a major public health, social and economic problem in Nepal. The HIV epidemic is currently concentrated among injecting drug users, female sex workers, labour migrants and men having sex with men. In Nepal, stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS has been reported within families, community and health care setting. This cross-sectional study on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of physicians on HIV/AIDS, conducted in four conveniently sampled health facilities in Nepal, attempts to explore the negative attitudes and practices of physicians towards people with HIV/AIDS.

In this study, knowledge of a majority of physicians on HIV transmission was found to be adequate. However, misconceptions mainly, on the non-sexual modes of HIV transmission were prevalent. Physicians had a number of negative attitudes towards patients with HIV/AIDS. These misconceptions and negative attitudes held by physicians were similar to those held by the general public. These misconceptions and negative attitudes could have originated in the cultural model of HIV AIDS, rather than gaps in biomedical knowledge of HIV/AIDS. The negative attitudes and practices, however, could be explained and understood within the conceptual framework of cultural counter transference, where physicians impose their cultural values, assumptions and expectations on their patients. In this study, physicians' practice of HIV testing and counselling were found not to be compatible with the nationally recommended guidelines. In Nepal, physician-patient relationships are built around a medical paternalistic model, where physicians make decisions on behalf of patients. This may explain why physicians bypass patient consent and counselling prior to HIV testing.

In this study, limitations posed by findings of KAP study was examined and explained within the conceptual framework of cultural counter-transference. The cultural context in which physician-patient relationship is founded must be understood to improve physicians' attitudes and practice towards people living with HIV/AIDS.