Introduction

- Increasing understanding of HIV, virology and immunology has energized the global scientific community to develop a cure.
- Ongoing research is dominated primarily by concerns regarding the conduct and progress of the current trials aimed at durable drug free viral suppression (functional cure) or as true eradication of HIV (sterilizing cure).
- As of 2014, 54 HIV-cure-related trials were ongoing worldwide, and the number of studies continued to increase. Although a cure seems far in the future, we hypothesize that early, inclusive stakeholder engagement in HIV cure research is essential.

Methods

- We reviewed historical examples of stakeholder engagement in HIV clinical research. We focused on two types of interventions -- those which target high-risk, HIV-negative individuals (HIV vaccine trials, antiretroviral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)) and those targeting HIV-infected individuals (treatment as prevention, prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT), and treatment of acute infection in the context of cure research (Table 1)).
- These HIV interventions are clinically important, relatively advanced in clinical development, and at varying stages of program implementation.
- Our objective was to (1) examine the timing, profile and mechanisms of HIV stakeholder engagement in emerging HIV interventions, and (2) articulate a framework for stakeholder engagement specific to HIV cure clinical research.

Results

- We analyzed five examples of HIV interventions targeted at both high-risk HIV-uninfected and HIV-infected individuals: (1) HIV vaccine trials, (2) pre-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), (3) treatment as prevention (TaP), (4) prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT), and (5) treatment of acute infection in the context of cure research (Figure below).
- We examined the historical background, extent of stakeholder engagement and progression over time, and strengths and weaknesses of stakeholder engagement for each of these interventions.
- Examples of stakeholder engagement in HIV clinical research and translation to program implementation were described (Table 1 to right). Based on our analysis of these five HIV interventions, we proposed a five-step process for inclusive stakeholder engagement in HIV cure research (Table 2 to right).

Conclusions

While the prospect of HIV cure is perhaps possible in only a subset of HIV-infected individuals, there is cautious optimism that knowledge gained from these selected individuals could lead to better interventions for the general HIV-infected population. The recent history of HIV interventions suggest that a concerted effort in transparent and multi-directional engagement among stakeholders may help address expectations, answer questions, clarify misconceptions, manage failure and prepare for success in a timely manner. Stakeholder engagement is a necessary component of HIV cure research.

Relevant Literature

- HAJDF. 2013;470-471C:660-668.
- Tucker JD, Rauz S. Social and ethical implications of HIV cure research. AIDS. 2014.

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