

Sexually Transmitted Diseases in the Older Population in Singapore

H H Tan,^{*FAMS, MBBS, MRCP (UK)}, R K W Chan,^{**FAMS, MBBS, FRCP (Lond)}, C L Goh,^{***FAMS, MD, FRCP (Edin)}

Abstract

Background: Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in persons older than 50 years are rarely studied because STDs are more common in young people. **Aim:** To study the distribution and types of STDs in older persons, defined in our study as individuals aged 50 years or older. **Method:** Retrospective analysis of surveillance data for diseases notified under the Infectious Disease Act, which include syphilis, gonorrhoea, non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU), vaginal discharge and chancroid. Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections were not included. Data from notifications of diseases, such as genital herpes and genital warts, which are not compulsory, were also analysed. Period of study was from January 1996 to December 2000. **Results:** During the study period, STD notifications for persons aged 50 years and older accounted for 7.6% of all notifications. Among these older persons, males were predominantly affected. The most common disease notified in older persons was gonorrhoea (600 cases), followed by non-infectious syphilis (578 cases) and NGU (339 cases). There were 76 cases of infectious syphilis. The age-specific disease rates for this group of older patients were as follows (number of cases per 100,000 patients per year): gonorrhoea-17.61, non-infectious syphilis-16.96, infectious syphilis-2.23, NGU-20.66, genital warts-6.92 and genital herpes-7.33. **Conclusion:** Although STDs occur mainly in the young, it affects a small but significant proportion of persons aged 50 years and older. A better understanding of the epidemiology of STDs in these population is important for reducing STD morbidity and improving STD care.

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* Consultant

** Senior Consultant

*** Clinical Professor and Director
National Skin Centre

Address for Reprints: Dr Tan Hiok Hee, National Skin Centre, 1 Mandalay Road, Singapore 308205.

E-mail: hhtan@nsc.gov.sg