RAMP Project Abstract: Porto Alegre, Brazil

Project Title: Prevention Practices and Risk to Exposure to SARS-CoV-2 Infection in HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (Prep) Users

Project Type: Long-term project (9-12 months)

Proposed Project Dates: May 2022 – May 2023

Project Overview:

This research proposal focuses on the practices of protection and exposure to SARS-CoV-2 infection in people who use HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). The Clinical Trial Site in which we work is located in the city of Porto Alegre, state of Rio Grande do Sul, southern Brazil. We provide infrastructure and technical support for clinical trials to the treatment of HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis and, more recently, COVID-19 vaccine and treatment. It is also worth mentioning our partnership with the Hospital Nossa Senhora da Conceição, one of the most important public health institutions in Brazil. Our aim is the production of research data on HIV/AIDS, a health issue that has a great socio-sanitary impact in Brazil. Porto Alegre, where our research site is located, registers the highest incidence rate of new HIV/AIDS cases in the country, with the standardized HIV mortality rate being five times higher than the national average.

We have taken a close look at the challenge of maintaining prevention approaches based on the taking of PrEP during the pandemic. In a controlled clinical study setting, our participants remained adherent to the PrEP use, therefore it would be opportune to investigate behaviors related to the protection against COVID-19 and the points of convergence and divergence with sexual protection behaviors. The scholar who will be working with us will have the opportunity to get to know our research center, Nossa Senhora da Conceição hospital and our expertise in research and health care in the field of infectious diseases. During the development of this project, the scholar will be our partner in producing evidence that can improve HIV prevention strategies.

Project Summary: The aim of this project is risk measures for exposure to SARS-CoV-2 during the COVID-19 pandemic in PrEP users; and recognition of behavioral practices to prevent SARS-CoV-2 infection and sexual exposure in PrEP users during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A structured questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic variables and questions about attitudes and behaviors for COVID-19 prevention will be applied. In the qualitative approach, a comprehensive interview will be carried out in order to explore senses and meanings about the risks of becoming infected with SARS-CoV-2 and sexually transmitted infections during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this phase, 20 participants will be selected, composing the group by criteria of representation of key populations taking PrEP: gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM); trans people; sex workers and serodifferent partnerships. As a result, it is expected to obtain advances in knowledge about the risks of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 during the COVID-19 pandemic in PrEP users and about the meanings that these people attribute to the risks related to covid-19 and to HIV/AIDS.
Regulatory requirements for the project and plans for completing them: The proposal will be written during the month of December 2021. The project submission to the Hospital Nossa Senhora da Conceicao Human Research Ethics Committee will be in January, 2022. The approval is expected to take place in May, 2022, with data collection starting in June, 2022. The scholar will be required to complete GCP training and HSP training.

Expected Deliverables: One-month on-site training; 8 months developing and conducting the survey, in-depth interviews, coordinating the schedule of participants visits, questionnaires application, follow-up, and workshop; and 3 months on- and off-site analyzing data, preparing results for a poster/oral presentation at HVTN Meeting, at Congresso Brasileiro de Infectologia (Brazilian Congress of Infectology) and for publication.

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