Background

- Most HIV cure-directed clinical trials require an analytical treatment interruption (ATI) to test the efficacy of interventions aimed at keeping HIV suppressed in the absence of antiretroviral treatment (ART).
- Little is known about how people with HIV (PWH) articulate or feel about having experienced extended ATIs.

Objective

- Identify participant-centered outcomes for participation in a cure-directed clinical trial.

Methods

Gathered through the BEAT-HIV Parent Study, a combination of immunomodulatory drugs were given for 38 weeks after ART interruption.

ATI was 38 weeks in duration. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using direct content analysis in collaboration with BEAT-HIV CAB.

Results

Participants viewed the ATI as positive because they appreciated a respite from daily medication. Some reported increased self-confidence when their counts remained low during the ATI, before viral rebound.

Concerns & Disappointment with ATI

When viral counts rose, some expressed feelings of fear, frustration, anger and despair. Three expressed disappointment that they were not cured of their HIV. Rising viral loads led some to feel a sense of failure.

Positive Experiences with ATI

Participants reported a positive and trusting relationship with the clinical trial team. Reciprocal respectful relationships between participants and study staff were noted as helping to mitigate participants’ safety concerns.

Relationship with Research Team

Data Analysis

Discussion and Future Avenues

Our socio-behavioral study identifies key points for intervention and participant support during HIV cure-directed studies including an extended ATI. Managing expectations, focusing on participants’ contributions, and providing support to reduce feelings of having failed the research team and/or the HIV community following viral rebound should be part of study design. Our study illustrates that trust in health care and research is important to participate in research. Continued efforts to understand how PWH experience ATIs will improve future designs of HIV cure-directed clinical trials.

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