



A Glossary of Terms for a New World of HIV Care

Long-acting injectables have expanded the HIV vocabulary.

January 16, 2024 By Jay Lassiter

Scientific progress often means a slew of new vocabulary words. Novel treatments like long-acting injectables to treat HIV are no exception. Some of the terms below are highly technical; others will sound familiar but with a modern twist.

Having a proactive conversation with your clinician about HIV treatment isn't always easy. Brushing up on the terminology—old and new—can be empowering and help you better manage an important conversation about self-care.

Antiretroviral therapy (also known as ART) is another, fancier name for your HIV medications. If you're on HIV meds, you're on ART, which involves taking multiple drugs to manage HIV infection. For many, ART has evolved from dozens of pills into a single daily pill. There is also a complete long-lasting injectable regimen that lasts for 60 days.

Cocktail is a common euphemism for multiple HIV meds used in combination.

Clinical trials are research studies that test the efficacy and safety of novel drug therapies. Participants in the clinical trials that led to the approval of the first complete long-acting injectable for HIV treatment in January 2021 were randomly sorted into two categories. Some continued oral therapy, while others switched to monthly injections. Participants in both camps remained equally virologically suppressed demonstrating the drug's safety and efficacy.

Virologically suppressed is another way to describe an undetectable viral load in an HIV-positive person's blood. An undetectable viral load is the mark of effective ART. Scientific evidence demonstrates that virologically suppressed people with HIV are not infectious and cannot transmit the virus via sex.

U=U is an acronym for Undetectable Equals Untransmittable. The international U=U campaign promotes the extraordinary news that HIV-positive people with an undetectable viral load do not transmit the virus during sex. U=U is the ultimate goal for anyone on ART, including long-acting injectables.

Oral lead-in is a way for clinicians to determine whether long-acting injectables are a good fit for patients. During the oral lead-in phase, people take medicines in pill form to reveal any sensitivities or side effects. An oral lead-in phase, which can last up to a month, is not required for the only complete long-acting injectable regimen, but many clinicians prefer to build it into the transition process. Patients always have a say in the matter.

Compassionate access enables the use of a drug under special circumstances. This can apply to experimental drugs as well as off-label uses for already-approved drugs. This continues a long tradition of people with HIV relying on compassionate access exemptions to access novel and experimental drugs to combat the virus.

© 2024 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

<https://www.poz.com/article/glossary-terms-new-world-hiv-care>