

**Session/Topic**  
Pharmacology of HIV

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**Title:**

**Optimizing HIV therapy: A consensus project on differences between antiretroviral agents**

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**Abstract:**

**Background.** The identification of the most effective highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) regimens in different clinical settings is still a much debated issue. Lamivudine (3TC) and emtricitabine (FTC) are often perceived as similar if not totally interchangeable molecules, while these two deoxy-cytidine analogues are reported to have some significant differences in pharmacokinetic properties, antiviral activity and resistance-associated mutations (RAM) emergence at failure.

**Objectives.** The aim of this study was to measure the degree of consensus on two issues in antiretroviral therapy: a) compactness of a combination and b) differences between 3TC and emtricitabine FTC among a large group of leading Italian HIV/AIDS clinical experts by using the Delphi Technique.

**Methods.** The study adopted the Delphi technique to reach a consensus on a series of topics. Issues related to the compactness of combinations and 3TC or FTC were identified by a board of experts and proposed to 80 HIV/AIDS Italian specialists in the form of two (Q1 and Q2) questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered and collected one after the other and the answers examined and discussed.

**Results.** Q1 was sent to 80 HIV/AIDS specialists randomly selected from different regions of Italy. The 72 respondents (90% of those initially selected) were from northern (46%), central (32%) and southern (22%) Italy. Q2 was sent to the 72 respondents to Q1, and 62 (86% of them) returned an answer. By analyzing the replies to both questionnaires, the board identified the 10 statements that attained expert agreement of 66.66% or more. Most important topics are: a) the compactness of an antiretroviral therapy may influence adherence and outcome in HIV/AIDS patients with diverse clinical conditions; b) the panel agreed that differences between FTC and 3TC do exist with respect to pharmacokinetic properties, genetic barrier, antiviral potency, and degree of emerging mutations at virologic failure, and c) an easier HAART treatment helps achieve greater persistence of the regimen in both naïve and experienced patients.

**Conclusions.** Compactness, adherence and a high level of persistence may play a major role in the overall effectiveness of a HAART combination in HIV/AIDS therapy.