



HAART as Prevention: A Positive Perspective

The following position statement and subsequent elaboration was accepted by the BCPWA Board of Directors at its meeting of August 2, 2006.

Overall Position Statement on “HAART as Prevention”:

Cautious Optimism

While the BCPWA Society supports the provision of Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Therapies (HAART) to all who want it and would benefit from its use, we believe that the eradication of the HIV epidemic requires a complex, multi-faceted approach. To maximize the effectiveness of treatments, various related strategies must simultaneously be in place and other issues should be addressed.

Related issues:

Empowerment is Paramount: Informed Consent and Choice

Participation in prevention-HAART must be entirely voluntary for HIV-positive British Columbians. This means that informed consent must be obtained prior to initiating HIV antibody testing and/or participation in this treatment protocol. Also, the option not to be tested or to participate in this program must remain the right of the individual.

Guaranteed Methods of Prevention: Safer Sex

Achieving an undetectable viral load may significantly reduce the risk of viral transmission, but this claim shouldn't be a rationalization against condom use. The advent of anti-retrovirals a decade ago gave many people the false impression that HIV was, if not virtually curable, at least easily manageable. Safer sex practices, including proper condom use, remain the only guarantee safeguard against HIV, STDs and pregnancy.

Safer sex messaging and campaigning must be reinforced concurrently with prevention-HAART

More than Medicine: Determinants of Health

Over the course of two decades, the epidemic reveals that adherence to drug regimens requires stable nutrition, housing, income, and support services for people living with HIV. The government must be prepared to ensure these vital determinants of health are implemented and maintained for PWAs before a HAART prevention strategy is initiated. The effectiveness of drug treatments can only be evaluated if the patient adheres to the regimen.

Keeping Focused on the Big Picture

While extremely important, treatments to control the spread of HIV represent only one aspect of addressing this epidemic. Funding must also be allocated to research cures, vaccines, alternative prevention methods, treatments for opportunistic conditions, and to provide ongoing psycho-social supports, services and programs for people living with HIV.

The Epidemics of Stigma and Discrimination

HIV-related stigma and discrimination continue to prevent people from being tested and from seeking treatment and support services. Widespread efforts must be made to educate the public about the virus and reduce the stigma commonly associated with HIV. BCPWA Society's current provincial campaign to End HIV Stigma is one example; the \$3 million year-long campaign has been funded by the private sector. The government must be prepared to allocate funds to awareness campaigns to help change negative social attitudes.