



REALITYBITES

News from home & around the world



New group involved in St. Paul's Hospital debate

Friends of St Paul's Hospital, an initiative of the West End Citizens' Action Network, is taking the approach that engaging in conversation will provide people with information that will allow them to form their own opinions about the future of the downtown Vancouver hospital, says coordinator Gail Brown.

For the past five years, Providence Health Care has been working on plans to renew St. Paul's. These plans include the possibility of building new facilities at the hospital's current site or relocating St Paul's to east False Creek, while retaining some specialized services at the hospital's current location.

"Friends of St. Paul's left the Save St. Paul's Coalition because they were too political," Brown told Xtra West.

However, Aaron Jasper, chair of Save St Paul's, says the future of the hospital is political in nature.

Source: Xtra West

Serosorting risk can be high

Some public health experts have viewed serosorting, the practice of choosing to only engage in unprotected sexual activity with partners of the same HIV serostatus, as an effective HIV prevention tactic. But a new analysis, employing a mathematical model, suggests that serosorting may actually be associated with an increased risk of HIV infection, largely due to recently infected individuals still thinking and disclosing that they are seronegative.

The San Francisco Department of Public Health predicts that new HIV infections among men who have sex with

men (MSM) citywide will be about 20 percent lower in 2006 than in 2001. The department attributes this primarily to serosorting.

But according to a research letter in the May 31 issue of *AIDS*, effective serosorting—as a method of preventing HIV transmission, at least among HIV-negative individuals seeking unprotected sexual activity with other HIV-negative individuals—is highly dependent on knowing the true HIV status.

"Without lying, some HIV-infected individuals may mistakenly believe they are not infected and disclose as HIV-negative," say investigators.

Source: www.AIDSmeds.com

Tool to calculate prognosis for PWAs starting therapy

The Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) Cohort Collaboration, an international team of investigators, has updated its prognostic model predicting the risk of progression to AIDS or death in individuals starting antiretroviral therapy. Younger patients starting HIV therapy with a CD4 cell count above 350 cells had the lowest probability of progression to AIDS or death in the updated model, underlining the importance of timely diagnosis of HIV infection.

The model, which now makes predictions for five years after HIV therapy is started, takes into account factors such as age, CD4 cell count, viral load, and mode of HIV transmission.

The investigators' findings are published in the May 31 edition of *AIDS* and the prognostic model will soon be available online at www.art-cohort-collaboration.org.

Source: www.aidsmap.com

Foundation announces new price cuts for tenofovir

The Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative has secured new and substantial reductions in the price of second-line antiretroviral drugs for low and middle-income countries, and also a price of \$339 a year for a triple combination, tenofovir-based once-daily pill for first-line treatment.

The Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative has been charged by UNITAID (the international drug purchase facility through the World Health Organization) with achieving lower prices for second-line and pediatric antiretroviral drugs, chiefly by working with generic manufacturers to identify cost-saving improvements in the production's process. UNITAID is funded by airline passenger levies and other contributions from around 30 countries, including France, Chile, Norway, and the UK.

These price reduction offers all come from two Indian generic drug companies, Cipla and Matrix, who will receive a guaranteed volume of orders that will allow them to scale up production, leading in turn to economies of scale.

Source: www.aidsmap.com

Thai health program receives Gates Award

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced that the Population and Community Development Association (PDA) of Thailand has won the 2007 Gates Award for Global Health, in recognition of its pioneering work in family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention.

The \$1 million Gates Award—the world's largest prize for international health—honours extraordinary efforts to improve health in developing countries.

continued on next page



REALITYBITES

News from home & around the world



PDA was selected from more than 90 nominees by a jury of international health leaders.

Founded in 1974 to provide family planning education to women in rural Thailand, PDA is now the country's largest non-profit organization. Its full-time staff of 600, along with more than 12,000 volunteers, has reached more than 10 million Thais in nearly 18,000 villages and poor urban communities. PDA's HIV prevention and family planning programs are renowned in the global public health field, and they have provided models for other countries to follow.

Source: www.medicalnewstoday.com

Researchers find peptide that encourages HIV infection

UCLA AIDS Institute researchers have discovered that when a crucial portion of a peptide structure in monkeys that defends against viruses, bacteria, and other foreign invaders is reversed, the peptide actually encourages infection with HIV.

The findings, published in the April issue of *AIDS Research and Human Retroviruses*, could pave the way for the use of such peptides in gene therapy using HIV-based vectors as the delivery method.

Retrocyclin-1 is a circular peptide that studies have shown inhibits the infection of CD4 cells with HIV. RC-111 is also cyclic and has the same amino acid sequence as retrocyclin-1. In both peptides, the amino acids are strung like 18 beads along the molecule's backbone. The amino acids in RC-111, however, are in reverse order.

Researchers discovered that while retrocyclin-1 inhibited infection of CD4 cells with HIV by about 95 percent, the RC-111 variant enhanced viral infection five-fold.

Source: www.eurekalert.org

PWAs may need longer duration of TB treatment

HIV-positive people who receive the standard tuberculosis therapy consisting of six months treatment with a rifamycin-based regimen are significantly more likely to experience a relapse of their tuberculosis than are HIV-negative individuals treated with the same regimen, according to a retrospective American study published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*.

Investigators found that the only factors associated with relapse of tuberculosis among HIV-positive patients were shorter duration of tuberculosis treatment and being prescribed a regimen of anti-tuberculosis drugs involving intermittent dosing. HIV-positive individuals who received potent antiretroviral therapy during their tuberculosis treatment were significantly less likely to relapse, had a quicker response to tuberculosis therapy, and experienced fewer side effects related to their tuberculosis treatment.

The investigators noted that HIV-positive patients were significantly more likely than HIV-uninfected individuals to receive over six months of tuberculosis therapy. Nevertheless, 7 percent of HIV-positive patients who completed treatment experienced a relapse of their

tuberculosis compared to just 1 percent of HIV-negative patients.

Source: www.aidsmap.com

Rise in new HIV infections among gay men in Hong Kong

New HIV infections among gay men are on the rise in Hong Kong, and a government consultant warned that prevalence of the disease in this group could hit 30 percent by 2020 if nothing is done.

The government reported 91 new HIV infections in the first quarter of 2007, up from 89 in the same period in 2006. Of those, 35 were men who had sex with men. This compared with 29 new infections in the first quarter of 2006 and 19 in the same period of 2005.

Concern groups say the spike in new HIV infections among gay men is not confined to Hong Kong. High prevalence rates are observed in Thailand (28 percent), Nepal (4 percent), Taiwan (8 percent), Vietnam (8 percent) and Cambodia (14 percent), according to a report in August 2006 by the help group TREAT Asia. Gay men also make up a substantial portion of new HIV infections in South Korea and Singapore.

Source: *Reuters* ⊕