

Upcoming

HAART breeds complacency on safer sex

British, French and Swiss researchers will report today that combination therapies for HIV can cause complacency among gay men regarding safer sex practices.

A study of 1,004 gay men in central London by the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine found that about one-third were less concerned about HIV infection in light of HAART, and were more likely to have unprotected anal intercourse. One-fifth of respondents thought new the therapies made people with HIV less infectious, though this was not associated with frequency of unprotected anal intercourse.

"It appears to be a belief about the effectiveness of the new therapies, rather than their impact on infectivity, which may influence gay men's sexual risk behaviour," said epidemiologist Jonathan Elford in a pre-Conference interview. "While the new therapies have dramatically improved the outcome for those with HIV, an option to be considered seriously by those who are HIV-negative is to remain uninfected – and that is an issue to be taken up by health-promotion workers."

French epidemiologist Phillipe

Adam will report on a comparative survey conducted by the European Centre for the Epidemiological Monitoring of AIDS in France and the Institut Universitaire de Médecine Sociale et Préventive in Switzerland. "The high level of risk practices among HIV-positive men, regardless of treatment type or status, remains an important component fuelling the continuing HIV epidemic," he told *The Bridge*.

The 1,097 survey respondents from Switzerland and 3,314 from France believed members of the gay community used protection less often than they had prior to the availability of new treatments, Adam found. Five per cent of Swiss respondents and 8% of French said they personally used protection less often. Contrary to some scientists' concern that people with undetectable viral load will think they can't transmit the virus, HIV-positive men receiving protease inhibitors were no more likely to take risks than other HIV-positive men.

However, Adam says false beliefs about new treatments have a negative effect on prevention, particularly for HIV-negative men who be-

lieve there is a cure for AIDS and who were significantly less likely to use protection.

"We need to make sure that

people not only receive good information about the new AIDS treatments, but also that they understand it," he states.

Unprotected sex continues in Fiji

Despite greater awareness of HIV/AIDS transmission and access to condoms, preliminary research on men who have sex with men (MSM) in Fiji's capital city Suva shows that a significant number continue to practice unprotected sex.

"Knowledge does not necessarily link to behaviour change," peer educator Jovesa Speith told a session earlier this week. "Despite fairly good knowledge about HIV/AIDS and STDs, men who have sex with men are still engaged in activities that increase their vulnerability."

The AIDS Task Force of Fiji research project on the behaviour and attitudes of men who have sex with men is the first of its kind among the 25 island countries and territories that span the 30 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean.

Speith says there are no prevention programmes in the region that specifically target MSM. HIV surveillance is "very uneven and inconsistent, and despite the relatively low number of reported cases, in many countries the risks remain significant."

Upcoming

Fighting for 'normality' with dementia

Irit Ben-Nissan of the University of New South Wales, Australia will explore the personal meanings of AIDS Dementia Complex (ADC) in Session D44 today.

"Within the AIDS community, as well as the public at large, ADC is perceived as a violation of the mind by the virus," she says. "What I want to do with this study is to demystify what it's like living with ADC, and to help people find appropriate ways of dealing with it."

Ben Nissan says people with ADC work hard to maintain an air of normality, to avoid being marginalised by the HIV community,

the gay community, and society at large. One physician informed a participant in Ben-Nissan's study that "his brain was rotting," she recalls. "The virus attacks more than just the brain. It attacks the essence of one's being."

One study participant told Ben-Nissan, "I need to come across well. Otherwise, people won't speak to me, because they just don't understand. It takes a lot of effort to come across normal, but what can I do? I know I have ADC, I know what it has done to me, but I won't let it take away my life."

'Restful' PWA lounge bridges the gap

by Dominic Vuichard

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pleased they've been with the welcome they've received, and with the support they've encountered from the volunteers assigned to the lounge.

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