



His Excellency Werner Brandstetter, Austrian Ambassador to Canada (left) presented the Grand Decoration of Honour for Services to Austria by the Government of Austria to Dr. Julio Montaner, director of the BC-CfE. Dr. Montaner won this prestigious national honour for his work that has made a significant contribution to combat HIV/AIDS in Austria.

BC-CfE celebrates two decades of path-breaking research in the fight to end HIV and AIDS

BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS marks 20 years of success

Special guests and friends crowded the Sutton Place Hotel ballroom on the evening of March 16, 2012 to help celebrate the 20th anniversary of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) and two decades of lifesaving research and innovation.

The event recognized the BC-CfE's incredible medical advancements, which allow people with HIV and AIDS to now lead longer and more fulfilling lives. It also honoured the memories of friends, family members and all British Columbians lost to AIDS.

"Through the support of the Government of British Columbia, UBC [University of British Columbia] and Providence Health Care, we have been able to attract committed and qualified individuals who have worked tirelessly to save and improve the lives of people living with HIV and AIDS," said Dr. Julio Montaner, director of the BC-CfE. "This anniversary and the many advancements we have pioneered at the BC-CfE belong not just to the BC-CfE staff, but to all the HIV-positive individuals, the families of the deceased, our community partners and all who have contributed over the years."

In a video address, Christy Clark, the Premier of B.C., noted that HIV and AIDS have touched the lives of many people around the world. "In the 1990s, I lost a dear

friend of complications from HIV/AIDS, so the advances that B.C. researchers have made in treating this disease mean an awful lot to me," said the Premier.

She added that due to the work of the BC-CfE, B.C. is the only province in Canada seeing a consistent decline in new HIV diagnoses.

"Tonight I would like to thank Dr. Julio Montaner for his leadership," she said. "He and his dedicated staff have worked incredibly hard and have been recognized around the world as leaders in HIV prevention."

As part of the celebrations, his Excellency Werner Brandstetter, Austrian Ambassador to Canada, presented his country's Grand Decoration of Honour to Dr. Montaner for work that has made a significant contribution to combat HIV/AIDS in Austria. The award is a national honour that is conferred by the president of Austria upon individuals who have provided outstanding services or public benefit to the country.

At the event, Dr. Montaner recognized long-serving members of the BC-CfE staff for their innovation and dedication to fighting HIV, and helping turn what was once a deadly disease into a chronic, manageable condition.

THE EARLY DAYS

The history of AIDS in B.C. began a decade before the BC-CfE was formed. In 1982, the first patients with AIDS symptoms began showing up at the doors of Vancouver's St. Paul's Hospital.

While some hospitals were sending AIDS patients away, St. Paul's threw open its doors to the growing number of people who needed help and brought together a group of committed health care professionals who formed the AIDS Care Team.

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» For 20 years now, the BC-CfE has been a global leader in its field, helping to put Vancouver on the map for cutting-edge research, treatment, and policy counsel. Vancouver is proud to be home to such a widely-renowned hub in the fight to improve the health of those living with HIV/AIDS and to eventually end the disease altogether."

- Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson congratulated the BC-CfE on its 20th anniversary milestone.

» See full story above



Despite the establishment of the AIDS Care Team, within a decade of the appearance of the first case of HIV, a British Columbian was dying of the disease almost every day. With little effective treatment to offer, for most the virus was a death sentence. In response, the BC Ministry of Health established the BC-CfE.



Dr. Michael O'Shaughnessy, founding director, BC-CfE

"When I started in 1984, we had described the virus but we had no treatments. If a person received a diagnosis, it was bad news," recalls Dr. Michael O'Shaughnessy, founding director of the BC-CfE.

Under Dr. O'Shaughnessy's leadership, the BC-CfE established the HIV/AIDS Drug

Treatment Program, a research and treatment program designed to ensure that all medically eligible persons living with HIV in British Columbia have access to free antiretroviral therapy.

THE YEAR EVERYTHING CHANGED

In 1996, the concept of combination therapy, known as highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), was introduced. Its release coincided with the XI International AIDS Conference in Vancouver. There, new evidence supporting HAART was presented.

"In Vancouver, we stood up at the podium to say that this is what the new data showed, that this was the new way forward, that this was the new way to treat HIV," said Dr. Montaner. "It transformed the outcome of this epidemic."

Evidence presented at the conference would lead to the immediate introduction of HAART as a therapeutic strategy for HIV in B.C.

TREATMENT AS PREVENTION

Dr. Montaner first introduced the groundbreaking concept of Treatment as Prevention in 2006 at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto. The strategy called for expanding HIV testing and increased access to HAART to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The government of B.C., the first in Canada to support the concept of Treatment as Prevention announced a \$48 million pilot project called Seek and Treat for Optimal Prevention of HIV/AIDS (STOP HIV/AIDS) in 2010. The pilot is aimed at expanding access to HIV treatment

among vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations. The Treatment as Prevention strategy to control HIV has gained the support of key international organizations including the Stephen Lewis Foundation, the Clinton Foundation, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

"We are blessed to have people of the talent of Julio Montaner and those at the BC-CfE," said Professor Stephen Toope, president of UBC. "People who are passionate, people who are extraordinarily talented and, frankly, people who are courageous in what they choose to undertake in their life's work."

Dr. Montaner echoed the sentiments. "I look back with great pride and satisfaction at the far reaching impact our work has had on this devastating disease. However, I know that our work is not yet done."



From left to right: Professor Stephen Toope, president of UBC and Ralph Sultan, MLA for West Vancouver-Capilano with Dr. Julio Montaner, director of the BC-CfE at BC-CfE's 20th anniversary celebration



Dianne Doyle, president and CEO of Providence Health Care at BC-CfE's 20th anniversary celebration



From left to right: After delivering the event's opening prayer service, First Nations elders Jeffrey Bear and Billy Bowman celebrate with Doreen Littlejohn, nurse co-ordinator, Vancouver Native Health Society; Duncan McCue, master of ceremonies and CBC reporter; and Winston Thompson, executive director, Healing Our Spirit.

WHAT'S NEW

BC-CfE unveils new logo

The BC-CfE introduced a new logo to help celebrate its 20th anniversary on March 16, 2012.

The revised logo continues to emphasize the importance of support and community, and highlights the concepts of innovation, advancement and collaboration.

The updated logo recognizes the importance of teamwork within the BC-CfE and its co-operative partnerships with local and international healthcare organizations.

By working together with partners in B.C. and around the world, the BC-CfE has helped make significant gains in the fight against HIV. This has led to a brighter future – without limits – for people with HIV and the communities where they live and work.



BRITISH COLUMBIA
CENTRE for EXCELLENCE
in HIV/AIDS

New BC-CfE logo

RESEARCH

The Politics and Policies of HIV Prevention in Sex Work

In a commentary published last week in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, Drs. Kate Shannon and Julio Montaner of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS discuss the concerning results of a new study showing that female sex workers in low-income and middle-income countries (LMIC) are 14 times more likely to be infected with HIV than the general female population.

The related study, published by Dr. Stefan Baral at the Center for Public Health and Human Rights, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, MD, and colleagues, was a meta-analysis of 102 studies representing almost 100,000 female sex workers in 50 countries. The study authors found that overall pooled HIV prevalence in female sex workers in LMIC was 12 per cent, and stood as high as 37 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.

The results point to the sheer scale of the epidemic and critical need for increased access to HIV prevention, treatment and care for sex workers globally, particularly given the established role of HIV Treatment as Prevention. Of concern, two thirds of countries had no data on HIV prevalence, and Baral and colleagues attribute this to the same structural conditions such as criminalization, stigma, violence and restrictive funding policies that increase sex workers' risk for HIV infection.

"All too often moral debates dominate the public health response among sex workers, and science continues to take a backseat to punitive approaches and raid and rescue operations," wrote Drs. Shannon and Montaner in the commentary. They go on to confirm that "as recommended by UNAIDS [Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS] advisory on sex work and HIV, the removal of structural barriers (e.g., criminalized laws and policies, violence) remains a necessary precondition to an effective HIV response in sex work worldwide."

Momentum Health Study launches

The Momentum Health Study is a new sexual health study of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) in Greater Vancouver. The study is being conducted under the leadership of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS with clinical collaboration with the Vancouver Coastal Health STOP HIV/AIDS team.

This study will obtain accurate estimates of HIV prevalence, community infectivity and changes in HIV risk behaviour among MSM in the region.

This study will be the first in B.C. to use Respondent Driven Sampling to obtain a more representative sample of MSM reflective of the ethno-cultural diversity of Greater Vancouver and inclusive of MSM subgroups not usually sampled in previous studies. Respondent Driven Sampling is a form of peer-recruited network sampling, where participants receive study vouchers to recruit others from their social networks.

BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

- > Improve the health of British Columbians with HIV through comprehensive research and treatment programs;
- > Develop cost-effective research and therapeutic protocols;
- > Provide educational support programs to health-care professionals;
- > Monitor the impact of HIV/AIDS on B.C. and conduct analyses of the effectiveness of HIV-related programs.

Physician Drug Hotline
1.800.665.7677

St. Paul's Hospital Pharmacy Hotline
1.888.511.6222

Website
www.cfenet.ubc.ca

E-mail
info@cfenet.ubc.ca

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How you want to be treated.



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