



International leaders discuss the importance of new HIV treatment targets during the roundtable discussion at the opening of the International HIV Treatment as Prevention Workshop in Vancouver.

Roundtable talk focuses on improving HIV treatment access among vulnerable populations

Research at International HIV Treatment as Prevention Workshop highlights need to target key affected populations and address stigma

Hundreds of leading HIV scientists from around the world gathered in Vancouver this April to share the results of their latest research on HIV prevention at the 4th International HIV Treatment as Prevention Workshop.

Previous workshops have focused on whether expanding treatment access is the most effective strategy to fight the global epidemic of HIV and AIDS. At this year's workshop, researchers were ready to discuss best approaches to implementing the strategy.

"Finally there is a consensus emerging that the science clearly demonstrates treatment is highly effective in stopping transmission in all contexts," said Dr. Julio Montaner, director of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) and co-chair of the workshop. He argued for being more efficient by identifying who should be treated and when.

Specifically, vulnerable populations such as women, children, and men who have sex with men remain at-risk as a result of ongoing discrimination in many countries, limiting their access to life-saving treatment and care.

"Progress is very uneven," said Dr. Luiz Loures, UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director. "The likelihood of access to treatment and prevention is much lower for certain key minorities such as LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender, and intersex], prisoners, migrants, sex workers, persons who injects drugs, and young women in Sub-Saharan Africa today."

Dr. Loures' remarks were made during the opening session of the four-day workshop. The roundtable session gathered high-level delegates from across the globe with the intention of bringing together key national decision-makers and pivotal international partners to explore the importance of new HIV treatment strategies and targets.

The session, co-hosted by UNAIDS and the BC-CfE, comprised representatives from the three key groups influencing HIV strategy—politicians, scientists and community—and set the agenda for the rest of the workshop.

"We should be setting one goal, and one goal only: to end HIV as an epidemic," said Dr. Mark Dybul, Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis & Malaria. During his presentation, he spoke of the need to move away from generalized targets and instead focus HIV treatment and prevention efforts on key affected populations, the people most marginalized and made vulnerable as a result of societal determinants.

"We have to bring the epidemic under control within all of these affected populations," Dr. Dybul said. "If we don't, we will continue to leave people behind."

Evidence presented at the workshop supported his argument. In Vietnam, for example, hot spotting—

targeting those regions where the HIV epidemic is most concentrated—has proven effective in reducing HIV transmission, according to research presented by Dr. Brian Williams of the South African Centre for Epidemiological Modelling and Analysis (SACEMA). Efficiency, he said, dictates HIV testing where the prevalence is highest.

Promising research results suggested the end of AIDS is within reach. However, conference delegates were cautioned that success is not guaranteed, and ending AIDS will demand new ways of operating. Eliminating stigma and discrimination—and engaging and giving voice to communities—may be the only way forward to ending the HIV epidemic.

Reaching those who are being missed by current treatment efforts is in opposition to punitive legal and policy frameworks that deter individuals from seeking the services they need. During the opening session, it was noted that 77 countries criminalize same-sex relationships, and that children are substantially less likely than adults to receive HIV treatment when they are eligible.

"We need to understand and act on local epidemics," said Dr. Loures. "We need to understand how they operate and understand how we can respond to them. This is much easier to do if you are bringing services closer to communities and to people."



» Seeing what the epidemic was like years ago, I never thought in my lifetime we would be speaking about ending AIDS."

— Dr. Luiz Loures, UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director, at the HIV International Treatment as Prevention Workshop in Vancouver



Dr. Wood takes on addictions services leadership position

Dr. Evan Wood has been named the new Medical Director for Addiction Services at Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and Physician Program Director for Addiction at Providence Health Care (PHC).

Dr. Wood will assume the joint position at VCH and St. Paul's Hospital at a time when Vancouver is struggling to address growing rates of untreated alcohol and drug addiction.

"In Vancouver, particularly in areas like the Downtown Eastside, high rates of untreated addiction have been a longstanding problem," said Dr. Wood, who holds the Canada Research Chair in Inner City Medicine at the University of British Columbia. "Fortunately, we know that evidence-based treatment can have a huge impact in improving patient outcomes and I'm excited to be part of a team that is very focused on improving models of care."

Over the past four years, St. Paul's Hospital has experienced an 89% increase in the number of patients presenting with addiction issues to the emergency department. The subsequent health and social concerns, including poor mental health and high rates of medical complications, have resulted in repeated calls to improve the health system's response to drug addiction.

"Addiction and the health complications of untreated addiction have become a primary driver of admissions to St. Paul's Hospital," said Dianne Doyle, President and CEO of PHC, which operates St. Paul's Hospital. "Turning

things around will require not only evidence-based prevention and treatment services but also the integration of research and educational efforts."

Dr. Wood is well-positioned to undertake this effort as the founding director of St. Paul's Hospital's Goldcorp Fellowship in Addiction Medicine, which is western Canada's first American Board of Addiction Medicine accredited fellowship training program. Dr. Wood's team is also responsible for addiction research activities funded by the US National Institutes on Drug Abuse.



Dr. Evan Wood

Photo credit: Martin Dee/UBC

Groundswell of support calls for decriminalization of sex work

More than 300 academics and researchers are calling for evidence-based decriminalization of sex work in Canada and voicing strong opposition to criminalizing the purchasing of sex.

In an open letter addressed to the leaders of the five federal political parties and delivered to all MPs in Canada, the signatories expressed concern the federal government is considering the introduction of new legislation that would criminalize the purchasing of sex, often referred to as the "Swedish" or "Nordic" model. The letter states criminalizing the purchase of sex "is not scientifically grounded and evidence strongly suggests it would re-create the same social and health-related harms of current criminalization."

"Evidence in Canada and globally has clearly shown criminalizing any aspect of the sex industry—whether targeting sex workers, their working conditions, their clients or other third parties—has devastating consequences on the safety, health, and human rights of sex workers," said Dr. Kate Shannon, director of the Gender and Sexual Health Initiative at the BC-CfE and Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of British Columbia.

"The Supreme Court of Canada's decision was very clear, and yet the federal government continues to ignore the science."

On December 20, 2013, in a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down three criminal laws relating to prostitution as causing harm to the safety, health, and human rights of sex workers. The federal government was given until December 2014 to create new laws, should they choose to.

The letter calls on Canada to adopt the decriminalization of sex work recommendations of major international policy bodies, including the World Health Organization, United Nations Population Fund, UNAIDS Advisory Group on HIV and Sex Work, and the Global Commission on HIV and the Law.

"We call on the Canadian government to meaningfully work with sex workers, as well as researchers and human rights experts, to ensure evidence-based laws or policies in Canada do not further recreate the same harms as the current criminalization regime," said Dr. Chris Bruckert, associate professor of criminology at the University of Ottawa.

Collaboration to study uptake of marginalized individuals into treatment

Researchers from the BC-CfE and Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation are working with co-investigators from across the country to investigate the impact of Vancouver's Dr. Peter Centre on the health and treatment-related outcomes of people living with HIV and AIDS.

The Dr. Peter Centre offers low-barrier access to services that facilitate greater engagement in health care and support, including services that reduce environmental risk factors and drug-related harms.

"This research seeks to evaluate the impact of integrated care services on the health of individuals living with HIV who experience multiple and complex barriers to accessing care," said Jasmine Gurm, research coordinator at the BC-CfE. "We hope the results from our research will provide essential information that will guide program development that better engages individuals who face challenges such as homelessness, mental health illness, and addictions into care."

In addition to a day health program, the Dr. Peter Centre has a residence that provides care to 24 individuals who require 24-hour specialized nursing care, as well as six enhanced, supportive housing units. The Dr. Peter Centre is the only facility in North America that incorporates a supervised injection services into primary health care programming.

Launched this February, researchers are working alongside peer research associates to recruit and interview 150 individuals newly engaged in care at the Dr. Peter Centre. To date, more than 30 individuals have been enrolled.

The three-year, community-based research project is funded by a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Partnerships for Health Systems Improvement grant and by the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research. As a study rooted within the community it seeks to engage, the study team has developed a novel approach to hiring Peer Research Associates that was presented at this year's Canadian Association for HIV Research (CAHR) conference.

Dr. Shannon receives AccolAIDS Award for human rights work



Dr. Kate Shannon

Dr. Kate Shannon, director of the Gender and Sexual Health Initiative at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, is the recipient of the 2014 AccolAIDS Award in the category of Social/Political/Community Action. The award was presented at a Positive Living BC gala event on April 13.

Dr. Shannon was recognized for pushing forward evidence-based health and human rights for key affected populations, particularly sex workers, and her overall commitment to evidence-based social and policy change as a necessary precondition to HIV prevention, treatment, and care. Dr. Shannon has been researching the impact of Canada's prostitution laws since 2004, and intervened in the recent Supreme Court of Canada case that struck down three key provisions of Canada's prostitution laws impacting the health and safety of sex workers.

A full list of nominees and winners can be found at www.positivelivingbc.org.

LECTURES & EVENTS

What's New in Addiction Medicine?

Friday, May 9
12 - 1 p.m.

Hurlburt Auditorium, St. Paul's Hospital
Guest Speaker: Dr. Todd Korthuis

What's New in Addiction Medicine? is a lunch-time series, featuring local and international experts, clinicians, and researchers who will deliver the latest research and information on novel, evidence-based addiction medicine topics. Dr. Todd Korthuis is Associate Professor of Medicine at Oregon Health & Science University and will present on "Integrating treatments for opioid use disorders into medical care: the role of buprenorphine and naltrexone". This special edition of *What's New in Addiction Medicine?* is co-hosted by the Department of Medicine, St. Paul's Hospital Goldcorp Fellowship in Addiction Medicine, and the Urban Health Research Initiative.

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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