



Dianne Doyle, President & CEO, Providence Health Care; B.C. Premier Christy Clark; Dr. Julio Montaner, director, BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS; Michel Sidibé, United Nations undersecretary and executive director for the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS; and Vancouver artist Tiko Kerr at historic announcement.

Global landmark: Vancouver first city in the world to repurpose its AIDS ward

Significant decrease in AIDS cases at St. Paul's Hospital leads to shift in health care priorities thanks to advances in treatment and care

The dramatic decline in the number of cases of AIDS, the most serious outcome of untreated HIV infection, has prompted St. Paul's Hospital to repurpose its AIDS ward, making Vancouver the first city in the world to achieve this distinction.

A packed room of community members and hospital staff gathered on May 27 as B.C. Premier Christy Clark – along with Michel Sidibé, United Nations (UN) undersecretary and executive director for the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Dr. Julio Montaner, director for the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE), B.C. Health Minister Terry Lake and Vancouver artist Tiko Kerr – announced ward 10C at St. Paul's Hospital will no longer be used as a dedicated AIDS ward.

"This is a proud day for British Columbians as we mark another milestone in our leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS," said Premier Clark. "Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the community, those at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and health professionals across the province, a ward that once served those dying from AIDS, now supports those living with HIV."

Ward 10C at St. Paul's Hospital in downtown Vancouver was originally opened as an AIDS ward in February 1997 during the

peak of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in the city, when approximately one person was dying of AIDS every day. In B.C., earlier diagnosis of HIV, along with advances in treatment and care, have resulted in a significant decrease in cases of AIDS.

"There was a time when there weren't enough beds to care for the numbers of people living with HIV," said Sidibé. "The pioneering work of Dr. Montaner and the leadership of British Columbia have helped to ensure that people living with HIV live longer, healthier lives and as a result the AIDS ward in B.C. is being refocused. This is an important milestone towards ending the AIDS epidemic," he added.

British Columbia is recognized as a world-leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The Treatment as Prevention strategy, pioneered by the BC-CfE, has been adopted by China, France, Brazil, Spain, and Panama. It has been endorsed by UNAIDS and implemented in numerous cities in the United States.

The province has taken an aggressive approach to addressing the HIV epidemic through programs such as the Seek and Treat for Optimal Prevention of HIV/AIDS (STOP HIV/AIDS) pilot. Beginning last year, the B.C. government provided \$19.9 million in annual funding to expand this program across the province

"British Columbia's dedication to the fight against HIV/AIDS has meant that we have reduced AIDS cases in Vancouver by over 80% since 1996," said Lake. "With continued focus on providing care, treatment and support for those living with HIV and related diseases, more British Columbians will live longer, healthier lives."

Sidibé praised Premier Clark for her government's HIV and AIDS response in B.C. and internationally. And he reminded the audience that nearly 18 million people in low- and middle-income countries still do not have access to antiretroviral treatment.

"Only with global solidarity, can we ensure that no-one is left behind," said Sidibé.

Patients living with HIV will continue to receive world-leading treatment and care at St. Paul's Hospital and at other clinics throughout the province. The focus of the ward will include treatment related to addictions such as various bacterial and viral infections like chronic hepatitis.

"It was not that long ago that HIV/AIDS was a death sentence and those who came to this ward at St. Paul's were here to die," said Dr. Montaner. "Today, ward 10C will provide treatment, support and care for those living with HIV-related issues. We have worked hard to make this day happen and I commend everyone who has supported our efforts."

» I know I wouldn't be alive if I were somewhere else in the world."

- Tiko Kerr, a Vancouver artist who has been living with HIV for nearly 30 years.



Tiko Kerr painting a symbol of a successful fight against HIV

» Tiko Kerr, a Vancouver artist living with HIV, presented a painting to Dr. Julio Montaner on the occasion of St. Paul's Hospital repurposing its AIDS ward.

"Dr. Montaner and I have fought a health battle together, we've been through a lot, and I want to present this new painting to him, because we did it. I'm still here and I'm not going anywhere anytime soon," said Kerr. "I am married now; I am creating new work all the time; and, I'm living a normal life."

While travelling in Australia in 1985, Kerr learned he had HIV and was told to return to Canada to receive treatment. By 2005, the virus had become resistant to HIV treatment and progressed to a deadly level.

"He was a walking corpse," said Dr. Montaner. "There was only one potential option for him, and that was access from Health Canada for the experimental drugs. We had to fight together against the Canadian federal government to get approval."

It was critical to get Kerr on experimental HIV drugs or he would have died. Dr. Montaner applied to Health Canada for limited access to a combination of experimental drugs on compassionate grounds on behalf of Kerr and a handful of others. For months, Health Canada refused to grant necessary access and one of the other HIV-infected individuals died while waiting for the treatment. In January 2006, after significant public pressure, officials finally agreed. Dr. Montaner put Kerr on the new HIV

treatment right away, and within five days, Kerr's viral load (the amount of HIV measured in his blood) fell a dramatic 90 per cent. Today, his HIV levels remain virtually undetectable.

The painting, entitled "New World (After AIDS)," sums up his struggle, survival, and success since he was diagnosed with HIV.

"Thanks to the care of Dr. Julio Montaner, I plan on living a very long, full and healthy life," said Kerr.



Vancouver artist Tiko Kerr and painting "New World (After AIDS)."

Canadian scientists agree HIV is difficult to transmit sexually

» More than 70 Canadian medical and scientific experts in HIV and its transmission, as well as the Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease Canada, have endorsed a groundbreaking Consensus Statement on HIV and sexual transmission.

The statement affirms the scientific evidence that HIV is difficult to transmit sexually, and details how the possibility of HIV transmission for a single sexual act varies from low to impossible, taking into account the impact of factors such as the type of sexual act, condom use, whether the HIV positive person is receiving antiretroviral therapy, and his or her viral load (the amount of HIV measured in the blood).

Specifically, in response to recent criminal cases of HIV non-disclosure in Canada, the statement affirms that sex with an HIV-positive person poses a negligible possibility of transmission if a condom is used or if the HIV-positive person is receiving effective antiretroviral therapy. At present, both conditions are required by law, but the evidence does not support this requirement. It is also notable that signatories to the statement uphold that oral sex poses at most a negligible possibility of transmission.

The statement also asserts that being spat on by an HIV-positive person poses no possibility of transmission, and that being bitten by an HIV-positive person poses no possibility of transmission unless the bite breaks skin and the HIV-positive person's saliva contains blood; even in those instances, the possibility of transmission is negligible.

Concerned by the increasing number of cases of criminalization of HIV non-disclosure in Canada, and the harsh laws used to prosecute people living with HIV, a team of six Canadian medical experts initiated the Consensus Statement, including Doctors Julio Montaner, Mona Loutfy, Mark Tyndall, Jean-Guy Baril, Rupert Kaul, and Catherine Hankins.

The Consensus Statement was presented at the 23rd Annual Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research (CAHR 2014) and published in the Canadian Journal of Infectious Diseases & Medical Microbiology. It is available through the news release section of the BCCfE website at <http://cfenet.ubc.ca/news/releases> (Canadian scientists agree that HIV is difficult to transmit sexually, May 2, 2014)

Richard Harrigan receives Research and Mission Award

» Dr. Richard Harrigan was named the 2014 recipient of Province Health Care's Research and Mission Award.

This annual award is presented to an outstanding researcher who leads an exceptional research program at Providence Health Care and also demonstrates the organization's mission and values.

Dr. Harrigan is the Director of the Laboratory Program at the BC-CfE and an Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of British Columbia.

For more than a decade, Dr. Harrigan has been a local, national, and international leader in the development of cutting-edge translational research with important implications for the clinical management of HIV.

Dr. Harrigan has contributed extensively to the understanding of HIV drug efficacy and resistance, as well as the human and viral parameters that influence HIV disease progression. His research in these areas has

played a key role in enabling significant improvements in quality and duration of life afforded HIV-infected individuals by highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART).

He introduced one of Canada's — and one of the world's — first broadly based clinical HIV drug resistance testing programs. This program has tested more than 10,000 clinical samples from across Canada. His work has involved investigations using four major cohort studies (HOMER, VIDUS, VLAS, and Vanguard), as well as the more than 5,000 people living with HIV in the BCCfE Drug Treatment Program.

The award was presented to Dr. Harrigan at the 10th annual Province Health Care Research Day.



Dr. Richard Harrigan

Allison Carter wins New Investigator Award

The BC-CfE's Allison Carter won the New Investigator Award in Social Sciences at the 23rd Annual Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research (CAHR 2014) in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Carter is the B.C. Research Coordinator for the Canadian HIV Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Cohort Study (CHIWOS), the country's largest multi-site, longitudinal, community-based research study focusing solely on women living with HIV.

Julio Montaner receives fellowship honour

Dr. Julio Montaner received an Honorary Fellowship from Douglas College, the highest distinction awarded by the college.

The Fellowship recognizes outstanding achievement or distinguished service by an individual to his or her community. Dr. Montaner was recognized as a leading physician, scientist, public health practitioner, and advocate whose contributions to treating and halting the spread of HIV infection have made a significant impact at local, provincial, national, and international levels.

"We are proud to recognize Dr. Montaner with our institution's highest distinction, Honorary Fellowship," said Douglas College President Scott McAlpine. "As an internationally recognized leader in the fight against HIV and AIDS, his research and advocacy have changed and saved countless lives. He is a remarkable inspiration to not only our college community but also to an entire generation of people."

LECTURES & EVENTS

HIV/AIDS Webinar Learning Series

Wednesday, June 25

8 - 9 a.m.

The HIV/AIDS Webinar Learning Series is a partnership between the BC-CfE and Positive Living BC. This webinar will focus on Treatment as Prevention, and feature speakers Dr. Julio Montaner and Paul Kerston. Registration is free at www4.gotomeeting.com/register/414328607

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

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