

Strategies to Control the Expanding Global Pandemic of HIV/AIDS

Kenrad E. Nelson

Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland USA

The pandemic of HIV/AIDS has been expanding for more than 30 years. There have been 39 million deaths since the epidemic began and it continues to expand. In 2014 an estimated 37 million persons were living with HIV and 1.5 million deaths and 2.1 million new infections occurred. Although access to highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART) has expanded in the past decade to include over 10 million persons (37% of HIV-positive patients), the epidemic is not under control. In order to control the growing pandemic new innovative prevention strategies will be need to be implemented.. These include expanding testing to identify infected patients soon after their acute infection. Persons at highest risk of transmission should be treated with HAART soon after they are detected and monitored. Relying exclusively on CD-4 count levels for instituting HAART is not optimal to reduce incidence Also, the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent HIV transmission in persons at high risk has been found to be effective in several clinical trials in different populations. But successful implementation has not been achieved. PrEP is included in the national AIDS prevention strategy only in one country, the USA.

These and other prevention strategies that have been found to be effective need to be rolled out globally. Progress has been made in expanding adult male circumcision ,screening and treating HIV positive pregnant women to prevent MTC HIV, and HAART therapy of HIV positives with <350 CD-4 counts.. However,, structural changes are needed in many societies to permit more effective prevention to be targeted to key risk populations, including MSM, IDUs, male and female sex workers, discordant couples and transgender women who have sex with men.

These key populations account for 40-70% of HIV positive subjects in most societies globally. Yet targeting prevention activities to these key populations is commonly avoided for political reasons. Criminalization of homosexuality in Nigeria and other African countries recently has had a serious adverse impact on the epidemic in these countries. Also treating drug use as only a criminal rather than a health issue by countries in Eastern Europe , Central Asia and other areas has interfered with the control of HIV transmission in these countries.

UNAIDS has set goals for the expansion of effective HAART among HIV positives in the next decade. However, expansion of effective prevention activities is also critical to control the pandemic.