



From left to right: Richard Lee, MLA for Burnaby North; Dr. Julio Montaner, Director, BC-CfE; Premier Gordon Campbell; and Ralph Sultan, MLA for West Vancouver-Capilano celebrate the work of healthcare workers throughout B.C. in the battle against HIV and AIDS at the Fall 2010 HIV/ARV Update.

Gordon Campbell honoured for commitment to HIV and AIDS research

Premier's personal and financial support leads to key advances

Speaking to an appreciative audience at the Fall 2010 HIV/Antiretroviral (ARV) Update hosted by the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE), Premier Gordon Campbell lauded the benefits of expanding HIV treatment and thanked hundreds of people in attendance for leading the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Premier Campbell told the researchers, healthcare professionals, doctors and community members gathered in the Sheraton Wall Centre Hotel on December 3 that saving lives and improving health are the core reasons behind his support for Seek and Treat, a \$48-million, four-year pilot program to expand highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) in Prince George and Vancouver's inner city.

"I believe that this is a life-saving treatment that will be used in jurisdictions around the world in the years ahead," said Campbell.

"It will increase access to HIV testing and help link patients to community-based support services, which are critically important in terms of the quality of life and the health of the individuals we're seeking to serve. And it will save hundreds of millions of dollars in averted health care costs."

Campbell said that he and his colleagues in the B.C. government are grateful for the BC-CfE's treatment advances and the work done by community members helping those with HIV and AIDS.

"Let me say a big thank you to all of you who are part of the leading edge of our fight against HIV/AIDS, who work day-in and day-out," said Campbell.

"I can tell you the voices that we hear from across the province, and the voices we hear from around the world, are saying that British Columbia is on the leading edge of dealing with this issue. We all take great pride in what you're doing."

Dr. Julio Montaner, Director, BC-CfE, thanked the Premier for his important role in funding and personally supporting the BC-CfE and many of the advances in treatment that have been achieved so far.

"If it were not for the Premier's support over the last decade, we would not be in the position that we are, so he deserves a lot of credit for knowing how to listen and ultimately how to lead," said Dr. Montaner.

Dr. Montaner noted a list of new initiatives undertaken in the province and supported by the Province of B.C.: enhanced new testing guidelines, implementation steps to support the Seek and Treat pilot, and expansion of a 1-800 line to help physicians, primary care providers and other caregivers access support and services. He also noted the Premier's leadership on health, finances, Aboriginal relations and climate change.

Dr. Montaner presented the Premier with a gift that emphasized the BC-CfE's appreciation for the Premier's personal and financial support in the fight against HIV and AIDS – an iconic Tiko Kerr painting of St. Paul's Hospital.



» ManCount survey results reinforce the need to reach out and provide HIV testing to at-risk communities such as gay and bisexual men, and highlight the extraordinary efficacy of HAART treatment, which has kept many of the HIV-positive men surveyed alive and in good health for a decade and more."

– Dr. Robert Hogg, Director, BC-CfE's Epidemiology and Population Health Program

ManCount reveals more testing required

A detailed survey of gay and bisexual men in Vancouver has found that most are being tested for HIV regularly and are using preventative tools such as condoms to reduce their risk of HIV infection and transmission.

However, the extensive study, called ManCount, also found that 18 per cent of those surveyed are HIV-positive, and 23 per cent of gay men under 30 have not been tested for HIV.

"The ManCount study provides important information regarding HIV rates and transmission in one of the communities hardest hit by HIV in British Columbia," said Dr. Robert Hogg, Director of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) Epidemiology and Population Health Program, who helped design the ManCount survey and oversaw analysis of the data collected.

"The results reinforce the need to reach out and provide HIV testing to at-risk communities such as gay and bisexual men, and highlight the extraordinary efficacy of HAART (highly active antiretroviral therapy) treatment, which has kept many of the HIV-positive men surveyed alive and in good health for a decade and more."

The ManCount study ran from August 2008 to February 2009. It consisted of a series of interviews with men in Vancouver's gay venues. Of the more than 3,324 men over 19 years of age who were approached to take part, 1,169 completed the survey and 1,139 provided anonymous "blood spot" samples which were later tested for HIV.

ManCount revealed that 86 per cent of gay and bisexual men surveyed in Vancouver have been tested for HIV, although this number drops to 77 per cent in those under 30. Of the 18 per cent who are HIV-positive, 70 per cent are taking HAART medications. Only 2.5 per cent of those surveyed



Dr. Robert Hogg and Dr. Mark Gilbert

were unaware that they were HIV-positive. Of those, 50 per cent were in-between tests.

"While we are encouraged by the high rates of STI (sexually transmitted infections) and HIV testing reported in the study, it is also clear that we have an opportunity for further outreach and education, particularly with young gay men," said Dr. Réka Gustafson, Medical Health Officer, Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH). "We will continue to work with our partners to increase the testing rates for younger gay men."

ManCount was a collaborative project between VCH, the Health Initiative for Men, the BC Centre for Disease Control, the Community Based Research Centre, BC-CfE and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). Similar surveys have been conducted in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Victoria.

"This research will help community groups and public health officials make better decisions," said Dr. Mark Gilbert, BC Centre for Disease Control. "The results from ManCount will help our agencies work together to ensure that gay men have the tools and information they need to live long, healthy lives."

HAARTbeats

Update: Test all sexually active adults



Dr. Patricia Daly and Dr. Julio Montaner

The BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE), the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and Providence Health Care recently recommended that all adults who are sexually active should be tested for HIV.

As a part of the STOP HIV/AIDS pilot project, this significant expansion of HIV testing guidelines is a first in Canada. By moving away from testing only those who engage in risk behaviours such as injection drug use, the new guidelines will help diagnose infections in individuals outside currently recognized risk groups.

An estimated 25 per cent of the approximately 13,000 British Columbians living with HIV are unaware of their infection. "This is not only bad for the individual because

they are unable to access treatment and its significant health benefits sooner, but it's also bad for the community because these undiagnosed individuals pose a significant risk of transmitting the virus to others," said Dr. Julio Montaner, Director, BC-CfE.

BC-CfE research has shown that early treatment saves lives and saves money. Highly active antiretroviral therapy reduces the amount of virus in people infected with HIV, making them dramatically less likely to transmit the virus. In B.C. the cost to the health care system of treating people with HIV is between \$250,000 and \$1 million over their lifetime.

"If we do these new testing guidelines well, we should be able to find a substantial number of undiagnosed patients," Dr. Montaner told *The Globe and Mail*. "If you could find everyone with the AIDS virus and give them the treatment, you could eliminate the HIV epidemic."

Data released by the Public Health Agency of Canada recently demonstrates there is a wide-ranging domestic HIV epidemic. In fact, new HIV infections in Canada in 2007, 2008 and 2009 were higher than the number of new infections in 1999, 2000 and 2001.

"Including HIV testing as a part of routine preventive health care will help alleviate the stigma around testing and promote early diagnosis of new infections," said Dr. Patricia Daly, Vancouver's Chief Medical Health Officer.

Community Profile

AIDS Vancouver Island expands testing

Marginalized Victoria residents at risk for HIV are better able to access rapid HIV testing thanks to a new partnership between AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI) and the Victoria Cool Aid Community Health Centre.

The two organizations recently received \$30,000 in grant funding from Gilead Sciences to support the expansion of rapid testing through the Access Health Centre, which provides comprehensive health services to Victoria's most vulnerable citizens.

Access Health Centre is one of just two Vancouver Island sites to offer rapid testing, which is available to those individuals identified as most at risk for HIV infection, including injection drug users, men who have sex with men, and Aboriginal persons. Rapid testing is also offered through the AVI Health Centre in Nanaimo.

AVI also operates facilities in Courtenay, Campbell River, and Port Hardy. The organization provides a broad range of services to improve the lives of individuals living with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

Among these services are counselling, support groups, meals, condom distribution, needle exchange, a toll-free information line, and referrals to appropriate health care resources. AVI conducts extensive outreach through prevention and education workshops delivered across Vancouver Island.

> AVI Contact Info

Location: 3rd Floor – Access Health Centre, 713 Johnson Street, Victoria

Phone: (250) 384-2366

Toll-free Infoline: 1-800-665-2437

Online: www.avi.org; info@avi.org

Research

Texts help people take HIV medications: Kenyan study

Dr. Richard Lester

HIV-positive individuals were more likely to adhere to their medications and have an undetectable level of HIV in their blood a year after starting treatment when they received a simple text message from a clinic each week by cell phone.

Study results showed that 62 per cent of participants receiving text messages followed medication regimens tightly as compared to 50 per cent who didn't receive texts.

Patients value the service because it feels "like someone cares."

The first randomized study of its kind was conducted by researchers from the University of British Columbia (UBC), the University of Manitoba and the University of Nairobi.

It recruited 538 participants starting antiretroviral therapy for the first time and who also owned a mobile phone or had access to a shared phone.

Patients were randomly divided into two groups: one group received the reminder text messages and the other group just received standard care, which was limited to counselling during clinic visits. Messages were sent once a week.

Study participants who received the text messages were asked to respond within 48 hours that either they were doing well or that they had a problem. A clinician called patients who said they had a problem or who didn't respond within two days.

"It's a weekly check-in and it provides them the chance to report on any problems they have with their medications very early, and the nurse or clinical officer would actually call them back and sort out those problems," said Dr. Richard Lester to the Canadian Press. Dr. Lester is with the Department of Medicine at UBC and one of the authors of the study.

(*Drug and Alcohol Dependence*)

What's New

To celebrate its 25th anniversary, AIDS Vancouver Island is holding a fundraising lottery.

Twelve works by Vancouver Island artists have been donated and will be raffled off. Tickets are only \$25 and are available until Feb. 14, 2011. For more information, visit www.artistsforaids.ca.

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

1.888.551.6222

Website

www.cfenet.ubc.ca

E-mail

info@cfenet.ubc.ca

Funding for the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS is provided by the B.C. Ministry of Health through Pharmacare and the Provincial Health Services Authority.