

Division of HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies

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Overview

In 2007-2008, the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies marked two major milestones: the completion of its 20th year of research into the behavioral causes and consequences of HIV Infection and its renewal by NIMH for another five years focused on the theme of “Meeting the Challenges of Global AIDS at the Intersection of Gender, Sexuality, and Mental Health.” Now in its 21st year, the Center is one of the oldest and most productive continuously funded AIDS research centers in the United States.

Responding to the evolving HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Division’s research focuses on sexual risk behavior and gender in order to design effective interventions to reduce HIV risk among children and adolescents, heterosexual women and men, persons who engage in same-sex behavior, and people with mental illness. In addition, it aims to help HIV+ individuals cope with HIV infection. In all of the Division’s research, it is committed to reaching the populations who are at highest risk, ethnically diverse, and often disenfranchised.

A particular strength of the HIV Center is its emphasis on the intersection of the HIV/AIDS epidemic with mental health. It has documented disproportionately high rates of HIV infection among the severely mentally ill and developed effective interventions to decrease sexual risk behaviors in these populations. The Division has developed training programs for mental health providers working with patients on issues of HIV and sexual risk behaviors. It has established a ground-breaking clinical care setting, the Special Needs Clinic at Babies Hospital, that has met the mental health needs of more than 1500 families affected by HIV.

The HIV Center is also a leader in innovative training programs that attract fellows and junior investigators who become independent researchers and public health officials. The Center is, thus, an important resource for the global scientific community, for local community-based organizations, and for legislators and policy makers.

The Division’s research program is supported by an infrastructure of six Cores: the **Administrative Core** (Core Director: Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD), the **Interdisciplinary Research Methods Core** (Core Director: Heino Meyer-Bahlburg, Dr rer nat), the **Statistics, Epidemiology, and Data Management Core** (Core Director: Bruce Levin, PhD), the **Global Community Core** (Core Director: Robert Remien, PhD), the **Development Core** (Core Director: Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD), and the **Ethics and Policy Core** (Core Director: Robert Klitzman, MD). The Division collaborates with sixty-three institutions and departments – nine other departments and schools of Columbia

University, thirty-nine other institutions in the US, and fifteen institutions in eight countries outside of the US.

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Patrick Wilson, PhD, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences

Director of Finance and Administration: Masud Rahman, M.S., M.B.A.

Current Research

HIV Center research addresses six themes, as outlined below.

Gender-Specific Interventions for Women and Their Male Partners: New methods and technologies are critical to enabling women and their partners to protect themselves against HIV/STDs. NIMH is supporting Theresa Exner, PhD, to conduct a large-scale structural intervention promoting use of the female condom in agencies supported by the NYSDOH AIDS Institute. In Durban, South Africa, Joanne Mantell, PhD, is conducting an NICHD-funded study of attitudes and practices related to the female condom among women university students and their male partners. With a grant from NIMH, Dr. Mantell is developing a multi-level structural intervention in Cape Town, South Africa, to integrate sexual and reproductive health services into HIV clinical care. Funded by amfAR, she is investigating the role of anal intercourse in heterosexual HIV transmission, studying the prevalence, frequency, meaning, social dynamics, and contexts of anal sex practices among men and women in South Africa.

With funding from the Microbicides Trials Network (MTN), Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD, is collaborating with the Adolescent Trials Network for HIV/AIDS Interventions (ATN) to evaluate the safety, acceptability and ease of use of a microbicide candidate in sexually active, HIV-negative young women who are participating in the MTN Phase I trial. Robert Remien, PhD, is working with Nabila El-Bassel, DSW, on several NIH-supported initiatives on women and their male partners, including a multisite intervention to reduce STD/HIV risk for African American couples in the United States.

Project FIO (“The Future Is Ours” PI: Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD) was developed at the HIV Center and shown to be an effective group-based intervention focused on the realities of women’s lives and their relationships with men, emphasizing negotiation skills and a range of strategies for HIV and STD prevention. Identified by the CDC as a DEBI (Diffusion of Effective Behavioral Interventions) project, Project FIO is now the basis of two new translational initiatives at the HIV Center. Susie Hoffman, DrPH, Jessica Adams-Skinner, EdD, and Theresa Exner, PhD are working with the Women’s Prison Association to adapt FIO for women recently released from prison. Drs. Hoffman and Adams-Skinner are also funded by the CDC (with Public Health Solutions) to adapt FIO for use by community-based organizations and clinics that serve heterosexually active women at risk for HIV infection.

Children, Adolescents, and Families: With support from NIMH, Claude Ann Mellins, PhD, has documented critical determinants of mental health and HIV risk among HIV-positive children and seroreverters in collaboration with four New York City hospitals: New York-Presbyterian Hospital, Harlem Hospital Center, Metropolitan Hospital, and Jacobi Medical Center. Her research team is poised to follow these youth through the

critical transition into early adulthood. With funding from NINR, Dr. Mellins has expanded her work to perinatally infected children in South Africa, adapting and piloting CHAMP+ (an intervention developed by Mary McKay, PhD, of Mt Sinai School of Medicine to prevent risk behavior and promote mental health among perinatally infected youth in the US). Dr. Mellins will examine the impact of the tailored intervention on family and social process variables that promote behavioral health outcomes among HIV-affected youth in South Africa.

Sexual Risk in the Context of Same-Sex Behavior: Whereas microbicides are usually considered for use by women in the context of heterosexual (penile-vaginal) intercourse, Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD, addresses their potential for protection in anal intercourse, particularly among men who have sex with men (MSM). With an R01 grant from NICHD, he is conducting an acceptability trial of microbicides for HIV prevention among MSM and was supported by amfAR to examine acceptability and use of devices for delivery of a rectal microbicide.

With an R01 grant from NIMH, Dr. Carballo-Diéguez completed a descriptive study of US MSM who meet sexual partners through the Internet to intentionally engage in high-risk sex. This study led to an investigation of the potential use of an HIV home testing kit in negotiation of risk in this vulnerable population. Also supported by NIMH, Dr. Carballo-Diéguez is working with partners from the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, to identify and describe cognitive, socio-cultural, and contextual predictors of HIV-related risk behavior; patterns and mediators of HIV testing; and prevalence of HIV among MSM in Buenos Aires.

Theo Sandfort, PhD, was awarded a grant from amfAR to explore how sexual minority stress and mental health affect safer sex practices among men who have sex with men in South Africa. This cross-sectional survey of 300 MSM in South Africa – stratified for race, age, and socioeconomic background – is being conducted in collaboration with the Human Sciences Research Council and a local community based organization in Pretoria.

People Living with HIV Infection: The HIV Center is part of a consortium of NIMH-funded AIDS research centers conducting behavioral research on acute HIV infection (AHI) to better understand the social and psychological context of recent HIV transmission and to assess sexual behavior, substance use, and psychological state of individuals with AHI. This work led to a grant from amfAR to Robert Remien, PhD (in collaboration with both New York City and New York State Departments of Health) to examine AHI awareness and entry into care among high risk populations.

Adherence to medical care among HIV+ people is a particular challenge in resource-poor settings such as South Africa, and Dr. Remien was awarded a grant by NIMH to adapt his effective SMART Couples intervention for social network dyads in South Africa, with the innovative use of computer-based media to enable the intervention to be delivered by counselors without extensive training.

Robert Klitzman, MD, has extended his work on HIV-related stigma and disclosure to HIV-positive health care providers to explore the impact of their health status on communication with and clinical care of patients. This work led to a study on privacy and disclosure of genetic diseases and to another study examining the role of Institutional Review Boards in observing, monitoring, and responding to research integrity issues in HIV-related and other areas, both funded by NHGRI.

Religious organizations have been central to the response of HIV/AIDS since the very beginning of the epidemic, and the impact of religion and religious organizations in relation to HIV/AIDS has been powerful in Brazil. With funding from NICHD, Richard Parker, PhD, and his team are conducting a comparative analysis of the multiple ways in which various religions have responded to HIV/AIDS in Brazil.

Mental Illness and Mental Health: Mental illness and mental health are intricately interwoven with sexual risk both for uninfected populations as well as for persons already living with HIV. Supported by a grant from NIMH, Milton Wainberg, MD, is collaborating with researchers, mental health care providers, and local departments of health in Brazil to test an intervention to reduce risk behavior among patients with serious mental illness.

The HIV Center has supported the work of the Special Needs Clinic, founded in 1992 by former HIV Center fellows, Claude Mellins, PhD, and Jennifer Havens, MD, as a part of the Pediatric Psychiatry Service at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. Currently the largest specialized family-based program in New York City providing comprehensive mental health services to children and families affected by HIV and substance abuse, the clinic has treated over 1,500 children, adolescents, and adult family members who are HIV-infected or living in families with HIV-infected and/or drug-addicted family members.

Basic Studies in Development of Gender and Sexuality: In line with the HIV Center's focus on gender and sexuality, the research program of Heino Meyer-Bahlburg, Dr rer nat, on the psychobiology of gender and sexuality development includes NICHD-funded projects investigating the long-term behavioral masculinization brought about by androgen excess in 46,XX individuals with congenital adrenal hyperplasia and the effects of the suppression of such excess androgen production with prenatal glucocorticoid treatment. Dr. Meyer-Bahlburg also leads the Gender-Outcome Site of an international study of rare genetic steroid disorders –including a variety of intersex disorders – conducted in US, Brazilian, Canadian, and French clinics.

Education and Training

The HIV Center hosts a range of training activities that attract postdoctoral fellows, medical residents, graduate students, Fogarty Fellows, Visiting Scientists, community leaders, and clinical providers from institutions in the US and abroad.

Founded in 1989, the NIMH-funded Behavioral Sciences Research in HIV Infection Training Program (Program Director: Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD and Training Director: Theo Sandfort, PhD) provides innovative postdoctoral training in sexuality research applied to HIV prevention science. Over three-quarters of graduating fellows have remained in academia, and more than 80% work in HIV-related fields. Of the seven Fellows in residence during the reporting period, five were members of ethnic minority groups, and three were women. The program is responsive to the changing research needs of the epidemic and reflects the Division's disciplinary and institutional strengths as well as its commitment to launching a new generation of HIV/AIDS investigators who can address critical research issues of prevention and care.

A major new training undertaking is the MAC AIDS Fund Leadership Initiative at Columbia University and UCLA (PI: Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD; Co-PI Thomas J. Coates, PhD). Two cohorts – a total of 20 promising innovators in HIV prevention – were identified through a nationwide selection process in South Africa. Funded by the MAC AIDS Fund, the Leadership Initiative allows participants to work closely with HIV Center experts in New York on issues of women-controlled prevention methods, communication skills and sexual negotiation, couples and families, and adolescents. Fellows are introduced to their grassroots counterparts in New York through site visits to community-based organizations. Upon returning to South Africa, Fellows implement the HIV prevention plans they have developed in New York, with 10 months of seed funding, mentoring, and support. The prevention plans are connected to the theme of gender inequality, one of the major drivers of the AIDS epidemic in South Africa and around the world.

The HIV Center is also home to the New York/New Jersey AIDS Education and Training Center (NY/NJ AETC) under the leadership of Francine Cournos, MD. This multi-site training program responds to HIV clinical care providers' prevention, diagnosis and clinical management training needs, thus increasing the number of clinicians in the NY/NJ region who can provide HIV/AIDS clinical treatment. The program builds community capacity for HIV treatment in minority communities, promotes culturally competent care, and disseminates best practices.

Since 1993, HIV Center faculty have worked with the Columbia-Southern Africa Fogarty AIDS International Training and Research Program (AITRP) to provide training for fellows from South Africa, Namibia, and Lesotho in the epidemiology, behavioral and basic sciences, and ethics of HIV. Formal degree training takes place at the School of Public Health, and both Mailman and HIV Center faculty provide training in epidemiology, prevention, and human sexuality. At the HIV Center, AITRP fellows participate in sexuality and gender research training activities and in ongoing research projects.

Led by Nabila El-Bassel, DSW, the HIV Intervention Science Training Program for Minority Investigators – based at the Social Intervention Group at Columbia University School of Social Work in collaboration with the HIV Center (Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD), the Columbia Center for Homelessness, and the Columbia Center for the Health

of Urban Minorities – facilitates the growth and development of a cadre of racial/ethnic minority scientists who are starting research programs focusing on disparities in HIV/AIDS and co-occurring mental health disorders.

Columbia University Medical Center's Clinical and Translational Science Award program uses the culture of clinical and translational research to develop and retain an outstanding cadre of senior faculty to lead the next generation of clinical and translational investigators at the Irving Institute for Clinical and Translational Research (IICTR). IICTR senior faculty (including Center investigator Robert Klitzman, MD) provide leadership and mentorship for junior faculty and trainees who are developing novel approaches to address barriers to multi- and interdisciplinary clinical and translational research.

HIV Center faculty participate in a range of other training activities focusing on interns, medical students, psychiatry residents, and fellows at NYSPI. Drs. Ehrhardt and Exner teach the human sexuality course for psychiatry residents; Dr. Meyer-Bahlburg directs the developmental sexology course for child psychiatry residents; Dr. Exner teaches medical students and psychiatry residents in conducting sexual behavior assessments; and Drs. Carballo-Diéguez and Remien collaborate with Dr. Exner in teaching cultural sensitivity in sexual behavior assessment.

New Grants

National Institutes of Health

Ehrhardt, Anke A. (NIMH; P30-MH43520) HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies

Mellins, Claude Ann (NINR; R21-NR010474) Adapting CHAMP+ for South Africa: Supporting HIV-Infected Youth and Families

Remien, Robert (NIMH; R34-MH082654) A Multimedia Social Support Intervention: Adherence to HIV Care in South Africa

Remien, Robert (Susan Witte) (NIMH; R01-MH080659) Using Multimedia Technologies to Disseminate an HIV Prevention Intervention

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Hoffman, Susie (CDC) Packaging Proven HIV Behavioral Interventions for Use with Underserved and Emergent High-Risk Populations

Pharmaceutical Companies

Carballo-Diéguez, Alex (OraSure; OQ-OTC-4) A Multi-Center Controlled, Observational Clinical Trial of the OraQuick Advance HIV1/ 2 Antibody Test OTC Product Performance in Untrained Users

Private Foundations

Remien, Robert (amfAR;106879-42) AHI Awareness and Entry Into Care Among High Risk Populations

Sandfort, Theo (amfAR; 106973-43) Minority Stress, Social Support, and Sexual Risk in South African MSM

Awards and Honors

Paul Applebaum, MD, was awarded the 2007 Isaac Hays, MD and John Bell, MD Award for Leadership in Medical Ethics and Professionalism by the American Medical Association. He was also named to a listing of the “Best Doctors in New York” and named an Honorary Distinguished Member of the American Psychology-Law Society.

Postdoctoral Fellow Katherine Elkington, PhD, received the 2008 Pizetsky Young Investigators Award from the Department of Psychiatry, which supports junior investigators and fellows in conducting pilot clinical research in serious mental illness.

Heino Meyer-Bahlburg, Dr rer nat, was appointed a Member of the Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders Workgroup for DSM-V of the American Psychiatric Association.

Theo Sandfort, PhD, received the 2008 John Money Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, which recognizes scholars who have made significant contributions to the Division’s understanding of human sexuality.

Highlights

- In October 2007, the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University marked a major milestone: the completion of its 20th year of research into the behavioral causes and consequences of HIV Infection, supported for two decades by a large center grant from NIMH and a range of grants from NIH, CDC, and private foundations.
- On February 1, 2008, the P30 center grant supporting the research infrastructure of the HIV Center was renewed by NIMH for another five years to conduct research focused on the theme of “Meeting the Challenges of Global AIDS at the Intersection of Gender, Sexuality, and Mental Health.”

- On March 27, 2008, the HIV Center hosted a full-day celebration – reflecting on its first 20 years and looking forward to the challenges ahead – that was attended by eminent researchers, community workers, funders, and providers from across the US and around the world. The morning plenary session included presentations by Quarraisha Abdool-Karim, PhD, from the University of Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa and Ellen Stover, PhD, Director of the Division of Mental Disorders, Behavioral Research, and AIDS at the National Institute of Mental Health. Further comments were offered by Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD, HIV Center Director; Zena Stein, MB, BCh, who is now Co-Director Emerita; and several other senior investigators. The day's events continued with an Open House at the HIV Center's offices. Conference rooms were dedicated to key supporters of the HIV Center who have passed away. The Open House also featured an exhibition of images of global AIDS activism such as the New York City AIDS Walk and demonstrations on Capitol Hill and at the White House as well as protests in Indonesia, South Africa, and India. At the same time, a permanent "parallel timeline" of the AIDS epidemic and the work of the HIV Center was unveiled. The day concluded with an evening reception and dinner at the Faculty Club of the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, with additional remarks offered by investigators, collaborators, and supporters.
- A four-city multi-site intervention (NY Principal Investigator: Anke A. Ehrhardt; U10-MH57636) demonstrated effectiveness in reducing unprotected sexual risk acts of HIV+ persons with partners of HIV-negative or unknown serostatus up to 20-months post intervention [The NIMH Healthy Living Project Team (Ehrhardt, A. A., NY Site P.I.) (2007). Effects of a behavioral intervention to reduce risk of transmission among people living with HIV: The Healthy Living Project randomized controlled study. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*, 44, 213-221].
- A randomized controlled trial, led by Susan Tross, PhD, and the NIDA Clinical Trials Network in 12 community drug treatment programs across the U.S., demonstrated that a brief, evidence-based safer sexual skills building group intervention, delivered by frontline counselors, can reduce sexual risk behavior in women in community drug treatment programs. [Tross, S., Campbell, A., Cohen, L., Calsyn, D., Pavlicova, M., Miele, G., Haynes, L., Nugent, N., Gan, W., Hu, M. C., Hatch-Maillette, M., Mandler, R., McLaughlin, P., El Bassel, N., & Nunes, E. (2008). Effectiveness of HIV/STD sexual risk reduction groups for women in substance abuse treatment programs: Results of a NIDA Clinical Trials Network Trial. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*, 48, 581-589].
- Milton Wainberg, MD, and partners in Brazil documented rates of sexual and drug using HIV/AIDS risk behaviors among outpatients with severe mental illness in Rio de Janeiro. They found that 42% of patients surveyed had engaged in vaginal or anal sex within the past three months, and comorbid substance use disorder was significantly associated with sexual activity. Only 22% of sexually active patients used condoms consistently, and overall, 45% of patients reported

not engaging in any HIV protective behaviors. [Wainberg, M. L., McKinnon, K., Elkington, K. S., Mattos, P., Mann, C., Pinto, D., Otto-Salaj, L., Cournois, F., & Project, P. (2008). HIV risk behaviors among outpatients with Severe Mental Illness in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *World Psychiatry*, 7, 166-172].

- In April 2008, the HIV Center and the UCLA Program in Global Health co-sponsored an International Workshop on “Gender and HIV: Policy Lessons for Low-Prevalence Scenarios, co-funded by the John Lloyd Foundation and held at the American University in Cairo. The Workshop – attended by leaders from both the US and the Middle East/North African (MENA) region – helped to define an agenda on gender issues for the International AIDS Conference held in Mexico City in August. Participants came together to identify and highlight cutting-edge work on the role of gender in the global AIDS epidemic, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa.

Publications

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