Easing the Pain of Adult Male Circumcision?

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Despite its many challenges, voluntary adult male circumcision has become a successful and well-documented tool of HIV prevention in the developing world.

So much so that in 2007, the World Health Organization and UNAIDS prioritized 14 African countries in which to scale-up voluntary adult male circumcision. Their goal? Nearly 20 million male circumcisions. Within three years, only 2.7 percent of that target had been reached. This is not surprising: Adult male circumcision requires convincing a man to electively undergo surgery on his penis; the procedure is expensive; and it requires skilled medical workers, sutures and anesthesia.

But an Israeli designed invention named PrePex may be a game changer. The device clamps the foreskin between a rubber band and a plastic ring to cut off circulation so that the foreskin dies and, after a week, either falls off or is painlessly clipped away. A study in Rwanda showed that the tool takes three minutes to apply and remove and can be done by trained nurses and eventually community health workers. What's more, PrePex doesn't require sterile settings. It's a bloodless procedure, and the pain caused by initial placement can be eased with ibuprofen.

A challenge with adult male circumcision is that the men must wait until the wound from the procedure has healed before having sex—if not, they could possibly face a higher chance of contracting HIV. PrePex will allow men to return to sexual activity more quickly without this increased risk.

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