International Male

Preventionisto John Chittick wraps up his five-year “AIDS attack”

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Meet the Indiana Jones of global teen HIV prevention: a self-described short, fat, white-haired man with a penchant for Hawaiian shirts. John Chittick, EdD—a 56-year-old Harvard grad known to his worldwide following as Dr. John—may not look the part of intrepid explorer. But during his five-year, 65-country crusade, governments have trailed him (in China) and jailed him (in Cuba) for his plain-talking HIV-prevention message. Still, Chittick has managed to school more than 150,000 kids about risky sex acts. “I’m not one of these sex educators putting condoms on my head,” he says. Instead, Chittick and a teenage translator hire a car in any given hemisphere, hitting the brakes whenever they spot a roadside audience. “I go directly where kids are and do an AIDS attack,” says Chittick, who’ll spend 20 minutes dishing out up-front facts on sex, needles and HIV. He asks listeners, in turn, to enlighten their friends.

In July, Chittick will present his findings on HIV honesty to the International AIDS Conference, in Bangkok—arguing that they’re key to curbing teen behavior. “Kids close off if they don’t think you’re telling the truth—if you turn and say, ‘We’re not going to talk about condoms,’” he adds, in a dig at the Bush administration. He’ll also report that sexual taboos, such as sex work in Muslim countries, have dissolved since 1999, with HIV education lagging prudishly behind.

Dr. John’s next conquest: building a global cyber network of chat rooms and websites dispensing candid, comprehensive HIV info. He wants to get teens the money to hit cyber cafés, print out HIV info and pass it on to their pals, creating an international army of AIDS educators. And unlike Indiana’s, we doubt this will be his last crusade.

Visit www.teenaids.org to trace Dr. John’s expeditions.

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