Study Identifies How Blacks Fare in HIV 'Treatment Cascade'

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Less than half of all African Americans diagnosed with HIV have been prescribed antiretrovirals (ARVs), and barely more than a third are virally suppressed, MedPage Today reports. Publishing their findings in the February 7 issue of the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), investigators at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) used the National HIV Surveillance System and the Medical Monitoring Project to conduct the first-known analysis of the famous "treatment cascade" phenomenon among HIV-positive African Americans.

The treatment cascade refers to a descending, or cascading, bar graph that begins with a bar representing all HIV-positive people and falls with each progressive bar, which account for those who have been: diagnosed with HIV; linked to medical care; retained in medical care; prescribed ARVs; and those who have achieved a suppressed viral load. In theory, viral suppression is only possible if an individual has successfully progressed through each of these steps in order. This necessity poses significant challenges for the push to improve the overall health of Americans living with the virus, as it is easy for people to fall through the cracks at each step along the way

Looking at data from 2010, which are the most recent available, the CDC found that, out of all HIV-diagnosed blacks, 75 percent were linked to care, 48 percent were retained in care, 46 percent were prescribed ARVs and 35 percent had a fully suppressed viral load.

Black men fared more poorly at each step of the treatment cascade than did black women. African Americans younger than 25 had diminished statistics compared with those older than 25.

The report speculated that poverty, HIV stigma and lack of insurance may help account for these troubling figures among the black HIV population.

To read the MedPage Today story, click here.

To read the CDC MMWR, click here.

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