Dance Party Supports Statement of HIV Risk When Undetectable [VIDEO]

The End AIDS NY 2020 Community Coalition releases a consensus statement on HIV viral load suppression.

April 24, 2017

A rally and dance party was held at the New York City AIDS Memorial on April 23. The event aimed to support the "Undetectable = Untransmittable" (U=U) campaign and to celebrate the public release of the End AIDS NY 2020 Community Coalition's Statement on Viral Load Suppression.

The rally/dance was a joint effort of the coalition and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. According to a press release about the event, the coalition's statement has been endorsed by more than 80 organizations.

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You can read the full consensus statement on the Housing Works blog here. It reads, in part:

> The New York State End AIDS 2020 Community Coalition joins national and international HIV experts to affirm the now conclusive scientific evidence that people with HIV who are on antiretroviral treatment (ART) that suppresses the virus to an "undetectable" level not only successfully protect their own health but cannot transmit HIV to others. In short, undetectable status equals untransmittable status, and public education and messaging about HIV should be updated to promote and reflect this reality.
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> The incontrovertible evidence that HIV cannot be sexually transmitted if one is durably virally suppressed is something that we all celebrate as a key milestone in ending AIDS as an epidemic:

- Fear of HIV transmission drives HIV stigma, discrimination, and HIV criminalization laws, so by amplifying the message that Undetectable = Untransmittable, we can dismantle this fear.

- Knowledge that a person who is virally suppressed cannot transmit the virus affirms the ability of people with HIV to live healthy, sex-positive lives, including being able to conceive children without alternative insemination practices if they choose and to engage in sex without fear of putting partners at risk of infection.

- This clear evidence provides even more reason for every person to know his or her HIV status, and for every person with HIV to start and maintain treatment without delay—to protect their own health and the health of their community.

The U=U campaign referred to in the New York statement is the work of the Prevention Access Campaign (PAC). That group has released its own consensus statement, which is garnering global support. That statement reads:

> People living with HIV on ART with an undetectable viral load in their blood have a negligible risk of sexual transmission of HIV. Depending on the drugs employed it may take as long as six months for the viral load to become undetectable. Continued and reliable HIV suppression requires selection of appropriate agents and excellent adherence to treatment. HIV viral suppression should be monitored to assure both personal health and public health benefits.

The PAC statement notes that negligible means "so small or unimportant as to be not worth considering; insignificant."

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The New York coalition's statement "enthusiastically supports" the U=U campaign and calls for the following steps:

- The Undetectable = Untransmittable news must be shared widely with people with HIV and disseminated by medical providers, educators and public health officials.

- Government must reexamine, in light of the evidence, all laws and regulations that criminalize HIV and discourage HIV testing.

- We call for review of the literature, further research, and dissemination of information on the

impact of viral suppression on other forms of HIV transmission: Viral suppression greatly reduces the possibility of transmission through breast-feeding, but guidelines for mothers vary depending on the countries in which they live rather than giving women the facts and allowing them to make what they deem to be the best choice for themselves and their infants. There has been little or no research on the impact of viral suppression related to injection drug use, which is the most efficient route of transmission and is a leading cause of HIV infection, particularly where harm reduction resources are not available. Our goal should always be to empower people with HIV to make decisions based on facts and not prejudice.

- Finally, we must work together and across systems to make sure that every person with HIV has the opportunity, means, and support to achieve durable viral suppression.

“Durable viral suppression is the most powerful tool in the HIV prevention toolkit,” said Demetre Daskalakis, MD, of the New York City health department (and the DJ at the dance party), in the press release. “The resilient people living with HIV who adhere to their regimens and get and keep their viral load suppressed are responsible for driving down the number of new infections in our jurisdiction to historic lows. Keeping themselves healthy means ending the possibility of sexual transmission of HIV. When status becomes irrelevant, stigma will disappear. We will create a future that is status neutral. The data support it, and so do we.”

For related POZ articles, read “44 Member AIDS Coalition Issues Statement of HIV Risk When Undetectable,” “NASTAD Releases Statement of HIV Transmission Risk When Undetectable” and “Does Undetectable Mean Uninfectious? The Challenge of Explaining HIV Study Results” or click #Undetectable.

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