HIV Co-Discoverer Calls for Domestic PEPFAR Plan

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In an opinion piece published in the November 16 edition of *The Washington Post*, Robert C. Gallo, MD—director of the Institute of Human Virology in Baltimore and co-discoverer of the HIV retrovirus—praised George W. Bush's President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for providing treatment to more than 1.7 million HIV-positive people around the world, but he said that a similar program was needed to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States.

"A PEPFAR plan for America's inner cities would help to neutralize and diminish the number of people contracting HIV and the number dying of AIDS," he writes. "It could provide access to prescribed care and medical therapies so patients with HIV can live a normal lifespan (many don't even realize this is possible). An effort to help these Americans, among our country's poorest, could also strengthen U.S. international relations, sending a message to the world that America recognizes that is not different from other countries and that we, too, have an HIV/AIDS pandemic."

Dr. Gallo adds that education is tantamount in preventing and managing HIV infection. "As long as socioeconomic conditions prevail, those living in HIV/AIDS 'hot spots' without education about the disease and facing other life challenges—such as mental illness, drug abuse, homelessness and lack of health insurance—will be at risk even if we do develop an AIDS vaccine."

Regarding a potential AIDS vaccine, Gallo said he is optimistic; however, he notes that a program must first be in place to "ensure that our nation is positioned to readily distribute the medicine, helping to put an end to this terrible disease."

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