Menopause May Occur Earlier in HIV-Positive Women

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HIV-positive women may experience menopause at a younger age than their HIV-negative counterparts, according to a study presented at the Fifth International AIDS Society (IAS) Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention in Cape Town.

Due to the success of antiretroviral (ARV) therapy, the life spans of people with HIV have significantly increased. This means that a much larger number than ever before are living well into their 50s and 60s. At this age, most HIV-negative women enter menopause. Because researchers have demonstrated that HIV can accelerate aging in a number of different ways, there have been concerns that HIV-positive women may enter menopause at a younger age than HIV-negative women. This has never been proved conclusively, however.

To determine whether HIV affects menopause, Myriam Pommerol, MD, from the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire (CHU) de Bordeaux, in France, and her colleagues conducted surveys of 404 HIV-positive women seen at their hospital. The women ranged in age from 19 to 79. Seventeen percent had already gone through menopause. A significant number were going through menopause naturally, (as opposed to surgically by hysterectomy). Menopause was occurring in up to 72 percent of women ages 50 and older, 21 percent of women ages 45 to 49, 3.5 percent in women ages 40 to 44 and in less than 1 percent in women younger than 40.

During 8.8 years of follow-up, 41 women entered menopause. Their average age at the start of menopause was 46. This is younger than what occurs in the general population. Factors associated with early menopause included African descent, a history of injection drug use and CD4 counts below 200.

The authors conclude that although their study was not rigidly controlled—they did not compare the women in their study to a similar group of HIV-negative women, and they relied on surveys rather than clinical examination—it does suggest that HIV-positive women may enter menopause earlier than HIV-negative women.

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