Planet POZ-August/September 1994

August 1, 1994 By Christopher S. Petrikin

Cuba

A dozen or so heavy metal fans–known as frikis (freaks)–have claimed to have injected themselves with HIV positive blood. “We gave ourselves AIDS to liberate ourselves from society and those laws about obligatory work and live in our own world,” says Luis Enrique Delgado, 20, who injected himself in 1990 with the diseased blood of a friend. Delgado and six other patients at a sanitarium in Pinar del Rio, 125 miles west of Havana, appeared recently on a video smuggled out of Cuba, saying that they, too, voluntarily received the AIDS virus. One of the video makers, Vladamir Ceballos, says he has the names of 25 young people from Pinar del Rio who injected HIV and knows of some 55 more from that have died. It is widely known in Havana that the defiant self-infecting took place in 1989-1991. While some of the frikis could have contracted AIDS from drug injections, a former Cuban AIDS health worker points to the rapid onset of full-blown AIDS among many of them as evidence that they’re telling the truth. “There is no other explanation for someone dying in two years but a direct blood-to-blood injection.” The Cuban government has not denied the accounts explaining, in the words of one government official, that “there was anguish and desperation throughout the society in 1989-1990: suicides, divorces.” Sanitarium life offers the frikis far more comforts than most Cubans ever see: three full meals a day, air conditioning, no power outages. The frikis also apparently appreciate the absence of police. (Newsweek)

Thailand

The first in a series of clinical trials in developing nations began recently as the Thai Red Cross began testing a new AIDS vaccine. The 30 HIV negative volunteers who were inoculated with United Biomedical Incorporated’s UB-1 formula will receive a second vaccination in four weeks, according to Dr. Praphan Phanuphak, director of the agency’s program on AIDS. Doctors will periodically draw blood from trial participants over the next six months and check their immune systems after eight months, he said. At that point, researchers should know if the vaccine will help develop antibodies. TheUBI-1 vaccine has already been tested on about 100 volunteers in the U.S., China and Australia and has also been approved the World Health Organization for Rwanda, Uganda and Brazil in addition to Thailand. (United Press International)

Some of Thailand’s biggest companies are practicing AIDS discrimination—a practice AIDS experts and patients say denies a large segment of society the right to work. According to Thai AIDS activist John Ungpakorn, some of the country’s largest industrial, banking, travel and retail businesses have compulsory HIV testing policies. The screening policies are an instinctive—although irrational—response to the AIDS epidemic, says Supanya Lamsam, a director

of the Thailand Business Coalition on AIDS. The tests are both expensive and futile, according to Lamsam, who says that the testing programs would not halt the emergence of HIV in companies. Thailand, which currently reports as many as 800,000 HIV positive residents, has a policy of conducting HIV testing only with the informed consent of the individual being tested. Ungkaporn, director of an AIDS action group called ACCESS, notes that while there are principles against discrimination based on a person's HIV status, there are no laws to enforce those principles. (Reuters)

China

China could face an explosion in the number of AIDS cases unless it launches far-reaching public education, health officials warned at a recent government conference. AIDS—viewed as a disease of foreigners and drug users is rarely mentioned in the official Chinese media and few people understand how it is transmitted. The proposals to be considered by the conference includes a requirement that the domestic media provide free time and space for AIDS information. While the number of HIV cases identified in China through official testing reaches only 1,361, government statistics place the actual tally as high as 11,415 and predict that the figure could surpass 253,000 by the end of the decade if preventative measures are not taken. (Philadelphia Inquirer)

Uganda

The number of Ugandan AIDS cases continues to increase despite concentrated education and prevention efforts. Recent medical studies indicate that public health campaigns have not been successful. Besides the usual task of convincing people to modify sexual behavior, Uganda must confront the additional issues of widespread polygamy and the low societal status of women. While the government's AIDS program concedes it can do little for adults who are already infected, it is placing special emphasis on the education of children aged 5 to 15 in hopes of preventing them from ever getting infected. Young girls between the ages of 15 and 19, however are six times more likely to carry the disease than boys of the same age group. (Financial Times)

Russia

Russia's first proposed law designed to confront the threat of AIDS must be widely discussed before it can be enforced, admitted a Russian parliamentary representative. The draft law would allow police and physicians to require blood tests from foreigners and members of high-risk groups and to do so without the guarantee of anonymity for those found to be HIV positive. AIDS activists were outraged and the foreign community concerned by the proposed legislation, which they called a violation of civil rights. The groups claimed it would most likely force AIDS patients underground and leave foreigners at the mercy of Russian hospitals and their contaminated needles. (United Press International)

Swaziland

Swaziland health minister Dr. Derek von Wissel brought AIDS education to the floor of the country's parliament recently when he distributed boxes of condoms to legislators. In response to comments by legislator Majahnkaba Dlamini—who had said that some government officials did not know the proper use of condoms—Wissel demonstrated his know-how by rolling one of the prophylactics onto a pen and waving it around. (The Advocate)

Ukraine

Ukrainian government health agency recently issued an appeal for money in order to conduct HIV blood screenings. The funds would enable the agency to screen blood it distributes to hospitals throughout Ukraine. Without this money the agency says it could not assume liability for the blood's safety. Untested blood in Ukrainian hospitals has increased the risk of HIV infection through transfusion. The statement also reported that blood donor services had virtually ground to a halt in various regions because of the lack of funds and fear of AIDS. HIV infection has primarily been reported in foreign students and workers from the developing world. While it is generally viewed as not as serious a problem as it is in other parts of the former Soviet Union, the country's medical services have declined from the poor standards maintained during the Soviet era. (Reuters)

Italy

Health workers whose jobs require contact with other people do not have the right to refuse HIV testing, Italy's Constitutional Court decided recently. The ruling by Italy's highest court invalidated provisions of a 1990 law stating that HIV testing could not be performed, under any circumstances, without the prior consent of the individual being tested. (Reuters)

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/planet-poz-august-september-1994-25506-9548