Pittsburgh Researcher Granted $17.5 Million to Develop Rectal Microbicide Gel

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University of Pittsburgh researcher Ian McGowan, MD, has received two grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) totaling $17.5 million to research and develop a rectal microbicide gel to prevent HIV transmission through anal sex, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reports. Topical microbicides are typically developed for vaginal application to prevent male-to-female HIV transmission.

McGowan's five-year Combination HIV Antiretroviral Rectal Microbicide program will use existing, yet-to-be-licensed HIV microbicides to develop a topical rectal gel, while a separate, four-year Microbicide Safety and Acceptability in Young Men project will measure young men's willingness to use the gel.

McGowan applauded President Obama's commitment to funding HIV research and his support of prevention programs that include men who have sex with men (MSM).

"The Bush administration had a very high level of discomfort embracing HIV prevention research in men," he said. "But I think in the Obama administration that's a nonissue. They regard domestic HIV prevention in men who have sex with men as an important research priority."

McGowan added that heterosexual couples also engage in anal sex, further validating the need for rectal microbicides.

"There's increasing evidence that men and women have anal sex too," McGowan said. "If we are interested in HIV prevention, we have to look at options for both men and women."

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