Who’s Removing Government HIV Fact Sheets Because They Show Condoms?

Answer: The Department of Health and Human Services

March 3, 2020 By Trent Straube

The federal health department has removed HIV educational material from a government website because the material included “unapproved” images of condoms, reports Kaiser Health News.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) had a fact sheet removed from the department’s Office on Women’s Health. The material was dated 2017 and wasn’t publicly linked on the agency’s WomensHealth.gov site, but it included images that had previously been used on social media to promote National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NWGHAAD), which is observed each March 10.

POZ had used the related images—see one below—in its write-up about NWGHAAD in 2016.

A related HIV campaign from 2016Courtesy of HHS Office of Women's Health

The images were used in messages on how to lower the risk of HIV transmission. A government official requested that the image be removed. "Since it contains the unapproved condom imagery, we were hoping you could remove the file from the server," the office wrote. The request was honored.

Kaiser says an HHS spokesperson refused to say whether a broader policy not to include condoms in HIV campaigns and educational material is in effect. But HHS has been under fire in recent years for removing health information from government websites, including content related to the LGBT community, which is at higher risk for HIV.

What's more, it appears HIV-related health information for women and girls is less specific than in previous years. For example, a flyer from 2018 and 2019 advises readers to "practice safe sex" but doesn't explain what that means, while versions from previous years went into more details.

In 2017, women accounted for one in five new HIV diagnoses. Most cases among women are a result of heterosexual contact (87%) and injection drug use (12%). In total, about 235,000 women and girls in the United States are living with the virus.

For more, see the POZ writeup about the 2019 NWGHAAD and look for information about the 2020 awareness day to be posted Tuesday, March 10.

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