Same-Sex Serodiscordant Couples Need Answers

May 12, 2011 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

A new HIV prevention study supports what many researchers, activists and people living with the virus have believed for years--antiretroviral medications reduce HIV transmission in straight serodiscordant couples (where one person is HIV positive and one person is HIV negative) by 96 percent.

In 2008, a statement by the Swiss Federal Commission for HIV/AIDS said: “an HIV-infected person on antiretroviral therapy with completely suppressed viraemia (”effective ART“) is not sexually infectious, i.e. cannot transmit HIV through sexual contact.” It’s important to note that what became known as the “Swiss statement” was only referring to opposite-sex couples.

The Swiss statement generated so much attention that it had to be put to the test--and it has passed with flying colors. This new study is great news for opposite-sex couples.

It’s also great news for opponents of HIV criminalization. This study guts the assumptions of most criminal laws against the transmission of HIV, which often assume exposure to the virus is always lethal, regardless of the circumstances.

This study provides hope for same-sex male couples, but it does not provide the scientific confirmation so much needed by men who have sex with men. I sincerely hope researchers and funders immediately begin to get those answers.

Having been in relationships with both HIV-positive and HIV-negative men, I am certain that serodiscordant same-sex male couples can be successful at keeping negative partners virus-free with current safer sex methods.

That said, we deserve to know scientifically if the addition of “treatment as prevention” will make current safer sex methods for men who have sex with men that much more successful.

If the answer is yes, it will not only have the obvious effect of preventing HIV transmission, but I believe it will also have an enormous impact on reducing stigma and discrimination. We need to know.

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