Takeaways From HIVR4P 2024

Studies highlight long-acting PrEP, HIV vaccine and broadly neutralizing antibody research and the importance of choice.

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HIV prevention took a great step forward at HIVR4P 2024, the 5th HIV Research for Prevention Conference, in Lima, Peru, this week!

More than 1,300 scientists, advocates, community representatives and policy makers came together to share and explore the latest evidence and emerging tools from HIV prevention science. Delegates included 203 scholarship recipients, who will take the knowledge they gained at HIVR4P 2024 back to their 50-plus countries, 40 professions and 180 organizations.

We came together at 16 invited-speaker sessions, 26 oral abstract sessions and 26 satellites and were enriched by almost 650 posters and e-posters.

Here are the four key takeaways from the science presented at HIVR4P:

1. Long-acting prevention options

One of the most promising breakthroughs under the spotlight was the advancement of long-acting HIV prevention options. Long-acting injectables are a more discreet alternative to daily medications, and their adoption could transform HIV prevention approaches globally.

Among these options is lenacapavir, with exciting data from the PURPOSE 2 trial of Gilead Science's twice-yearly injectable lenacapavir for HIV prevention presented. Only two HIV acquisitions occurred among 2,179 trial participants who were randomized to receive subcutaneous lenacapavir every six months.

This trial was conducted among men who have sex with men and trans women in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, South Africa, Thailand and the United States. Previously, the PURPOSE 1 trial demonstrated 100% efficacy in preventing HIV acquisition among more than 5,300 cisgender women and adolescent girls in South Africa and Uganda.

The lenacapavir injection has been hailed as a "game changer", but accessibility remains a critical issue. Advocates called for broader affordability and availability, particularly in low-income regions.

2. PEP and PrEP implementation

Several sessions at HIVR4P 2024 highlighted the challenges and innovative strategies in improving access to PEP and PrEP, particularly in low- and middle-income countries in Latin America and Africa. A recurring theme was the interplay between World Health Organization guidelines shaping national policies and, conversely, country-specific feedback informing and refining global standards. The session, "Differentiated PEP and PrEP – reaching more people with HIV prevention services using DSD", showcased groundbreaking models led by young investigators, designed to broaden options and enhance the reach of PEP and PrEP initiatives.

3. The importance of choice

The importance of prioritizing choice in HIV prevention strategies was discussed throughout the conference. As the HIV Prevention Choice Manifesto for Women and Girls in Africa asserts, offering a variety of adaptable prevention methods ensures that individuals can make informed decisions that best suit their circumstances. Recognizing that preferences may evolve, accessible and flexible prevention options are crucial for empowering communities, especially women and girls, as they navigate different life stages.

4. HIV vaccine R&D and bNAbs in HIV prevention

Tremendous advancements have been made in the prevention of HIV acquisitions. Yet, challenges remain in delivering HIV prevention to vulnerable populations, particularly in conflict-affected regions. Biomedical advancements are crucial, but there is one tool missing to end the HIV pandemic – HIV vaccines.

The HIV vaccine field is undergoing a scientific renaissance, with a diverse range of new immunogens and innovative approaches aimed at developing vaccines capable of eliciting broadly neutralizing antibodies (bNAbs), a potentially promising strategy for preventing viral infection. Although current research has yet to achieve the elicitation of bNAbs through active immunization, the use of bNAbs in HIV prevention is gaining traction, particularly as concerns about drug resistance and treatment failure grow.

The session, "Quo vadis: Future design and conduct of vaccine and bNAb clinical trials", explored novel vaccine design strategies, potential risks, ethical considerations and meaningful community engagement, as well as the viability of bNAbs as HIV prevention tools.

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