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Men using daily HIV prevention drug report high levels of adherence

WASHINGTON, DC – A study of more than 1,000 gay and bisexual men currently prescribed a daily HIV prevention drug showed high levels of medication adherence.

The study was conducted by researchers at the Center for HIV Educational Studies & Training at Hunter College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY). Results will be presented Friday at the Society of Behavioral Medicine's Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions in Washington, DC.

"For so long research has focused on the 'wrong' behaviors of gay and bisexual men, but we want to turn the tables on that. We want to examine what these men are doing 'right,'" said Thomas Whitfield, a study author and doctoral student in CUNY's Health Psychology and Clinical Science training program. "One of the things we've discovered is that for many gay and bisexual men, sexual health is important."

Researchers examined data from the One Thousand Strong panel, a national sample of 1,071 HIV-negative gay and bisexual men, ranging in age from 18-80 and representing 49 of 50 states. Men complete at-home HIV and sexually-transmitted-disease testing kits each year for three years. They also complete twice yearly online surveys examining sexual behaviors and other factors, including uptake and adherence of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for the prevention of HIV. Researchers specifically analyzed self-report data from the 12-month survey related to PrEP use and adherence.

Of the 1,029 men who completed the 12-month survey, 643 would be candidates for PrEP according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. However, only 83 of the men reported currently being prescribed PrEP. Adherence to PrEP, overall, was high: 60 percent reported not having missed any doses in the last 30 days; of those that had missed a dose, 88 percent reported missing three doses or fewer. The most common reasons reported for missing a dose were forgetting, being somewhere other than home, and having run out of medication.

These findings illustrate that the majority of gay and bisexual men who are prescribed PrEP are adhering quite well. Emerging research is also suggesting that four doses a week may be sufficient to prevent HIV, which would mean participants in this study had little potential for HIV infection in the event of exposure.

Although these findings are encouraging in the fight against the spread of HIV, they also leave areas to be explored further. For example, researchers said, what can be done to help men to not forget or to plan ahead when staying away from home?

The study also showed that uptake of PrEP remains low, with only 13% of the men in One Thousand Strong who would be good candidates for PrEP reporting uptake.

“Gay and bisexual men should speak to their medical providers about the potential for including PrEP as an effective prevention tool to maintain their sexual health,” said Jeffrey T. Parsons, PhD, a Hunter CUNY professor and one of the principal investigators of the One Thousand Strong panel.

Results of this study will be presented Friday from 6 to 7 p.m. ET during a poster session at the Society of Behavioral Medicine’s Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions, being held in Washington, DC, at the Washington Hilton. Parsons is a society fellow.

Findings are from the One Thousand Strong Panel, a national U.S. sample of more than 1,000 gay and bisexual men. The One Thousand Strong study was funded by a research grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (R01 DA036466: Jeffrey T. Parsons & Christian Grov, MPIs). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

The Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) is a 2,200-member organization of scientific researchers, clinicians and educators. They study interactions among behavior, biology and the environment, and translate findings into interventions that improve the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities (www.sbm.org).

The Center for HIV Educational Studies & Training’s mission is to conduct research to identify and promote strategies that prevent the spread of HIV and improve the lives of people living with HIV. We have been advocating for and working with the LGBT community since 1996 (www.chestnyc.org).

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