

Project RAP Slated to Participate in HPTN Social Network Study

Project Rap is slated to participate in the multi-site HPTN Social Network Study, also known as HPTN 037. The study is part of the HIV Prevention Trials Network and is sponsored by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), Division of AIDS. The Social Network Study will be a multi-site, two-arm, randomized, Phase III study of a peer educator intervention for HIV-negative intravenous drug users (IDUs). The study will begin in Philadelphia and Chiang Mai, Thailand, and may expand to sites in China and Russia. At each site there will be two arms or groups. One arm of the study will conduct a peer educator HIV intervention, while the other arm will conduct a standard counseling-based HIV intervention. This second arm will serve as the control arm, allowing the researchers to compare the efficacy of the peer educator intervention.

The study will run for

approximately four years. In Philadelphia, 100 HIV negative IDUs (index members) will be enrolled. The Chiang Mai site will enroll 150 index members. These index members will in turn be asked to enroll at least three members of their social network who are also at risk for HIV. Index members will be randomly assigned to one of the two study arms. Those index members assigned to the peer educator arm will receive HIV testing and counseling along with six sessions of special training.

The training sessions will teach participants skills and techniques for promoting HIV prevention within their social network. The

special training will be followed up by four booster training sessions. The primary purpose of the study is to determine if such peer educator interventions are effective in reducing HIV risk behaviors among members of the participants' social networks. The participants who are given the special training

“One arm of the study will conduct a peer educator intervention.”

HPTN site map



will act as "change agents" who will introduce information and behaviors into the social network in order to change the behaviors and norms of the group.

The primary objective of the study is to assess the effectiveness of a peer educator intervention model, as compared to a standard HIV testing and counseling model, in reducing

HIV incidence in injection drug users and their peer networks. Researchers will also compare the incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) infections among participants in the two arms of the study. Researchers will test participants for HIV, Hepatitis C, Chlamydia trachomatis, Neisseria gonorrhoeae, and for women, Trichomonas vaginalis.

In addition the study will examine whether the norms and behaviors of the substance use networks members change

as a result of the intervention. The behavior changes the researchers will be looking at include: sharing of injection equipment, cleaning and disinfection of injection equipment, number of sex partners, condom use during sex, and drug treatment utilization.

In Philadelphia participants will be recruited from areas in North and West Philadelphia where there are high concentrations of drug use, drug sales, and AIDS diagnoses. Visits will be conducted at either the RAP Office at 5th and Girard or the RAP Project's new offices at 3535 Market Street. The Project's Mobile Outreach Unit will be used to recruit participants in West Philadelphia.

Update on 014 Canary Pox Vaccine Study

The 014 Canary Pox Vaccine Trial Study moved into its long-term follow-up phase a year early because scientists were able to answer study questions sooner than expected. Researchers found that participants who received the vaccines used in the study (gp120 and vCP205), produced antibodies at a higher rate than participants who were given a placebo, but that the vaccines did not seem to stimulate the production of significant numbers of CTLs (cytotoxic lymphocytes). Since most scientists believe CTLs are necessary to protect people from HIV infection, the decision was made to shift resources to development of other vaccines. For long-term follow-up participants will be contacted once a year for the next three years. Participants will be offered HIV counseling and testing and asked some general health questions.

HIVNET researchers consider the study a success; it has produced information that will be useful in future research. Researchers found that both of the study vaccines appeared safe in both low- and high- risk participants. Participants who received both vaccines made more antibodies than volunteers who received vCP205 by itself. Participants who received both vaccines together did not make as many antibodies as participants in other studies who had received vCP205 alone and later received gp120. While, some of the participants developed killer t-cells, the vaccines did not promote the development of killer t-cells in all participants. Participants reported fewer or the same amount of

risk behaviors during the study. Ninety percent of participants reported a positive impact from being in the study. The most common positive impact was a sense of well-being from helping to contribute to the discovery of an HIV vaccine. Twenty-five percent of participants reported a negative impact from being in the study, mainly related to some aspect of personal relationships. The vaccines used in the study, and other vaccines like them, are suitable for future larger studies of how well vaccines actually prevent HIV infection. This study was key to preparing for future studies.

For more information on vaccine trials ask a RAP staff member for a copy of the video, "No Easy Answers" which was produced by Project RAP

"Ninety percent of participants reported a positive impact from being in the study."



The AIDS Memorial Quilt

Legal Clinic starts at Prevention Point Philadelphia.

On April 16 Prevention Point Philadelphia hosted a trial run of its new legal clinic. Nine clients came to the Prevention Point office at 333 West Girard Avenue to seek assistance with legal problems related to outstanding bench warrants. Mary DeFusco of the Philadelphia Defenders Association saw clients from 11 AM until 4:30 PM. Ms. DeFusco was able to take the clients' information and call into the Defender's office to check the status of bench warrants. Ms. DeFusco was also able to answer some questions about criminal law issues.

The clinic, which is being overseen by Karen Foreman, Director of the Office of Public Interest Law at Temple Law School, has been in the planning stages for about two years. The idea was first brought up at Prevention Point's Monday Night Group. Last spring two law students from Temple participated in a public interest clinical taught by Professor Scott Burris. The students came to the Monday Night Group, discussed issues with participants, and researched legal questions the group proposed. The students also created a basic legal manual for Prevention Point, which contained answers to simple legal questions, and legal and social referral information.

The Temple Office of Public Interest Law hopes to expand the clinic to have regular clinic days and hours. In addition to bench warrant and other criminal law issues the clinic hopes to eventually offer legal assistance with civil legal matters. The first step will be to expand the Prevention Point Legal Manual to include comprehensive legal and social service referrals. The manual can then serve as a resource for Prevention Point staffers to use when clients need legal referrals.

The clinic also hopes to conduct regular legal education sessions on topics such as police harassment, welfare law, women's legal issues, and housing law. This summer two or three law students from Temple will work on the legal manual, organize clinic operation days and times, and arrange legal education sessions. In the fall, when Temple law students return to their regular schedules, additional students will be available to help the clinic expand. For more information about the Prevention Point legal clinic call Roseanne Scotti at (215) 823-4228.

Dr. Erica Gollub gets new grant to do women's study at Center.

Dr. Erica Gollub recently got funding from NIDA for a three year study, looking at the effectiveness of a five-session behavioral intervention for drug using women. The intervention targets reducing sexual risk behavior. A total of 240 out-of-treatment drug using women will be enrolled during the first two years. Half of them will receive HIV counseling and testing and will also attend five weekly group sessions of two and a half hours each. These group sessions will be facilitated by a trained peer leader. The other 120 women will receive HIV counseling and testing and limited case management. The entire group will be followed up for a year.



Dr. Erica Gollub

The study's primary aims are: (1) to reduce the proportion of unprotected sex acts and (2) to reduce the number of diagnosed cases of STD. The secondary aims include increasing the level of knowledge about the body and women's barrier methods, and reducing unsafe drug behaviors. The recent pilot study, WomenFIT, demonstrated that basic knowledge about women's bodies and about use of protection methods, including the male condom, was surprisingly low among drug using women participants.

The new NIDA funded study will also involve a community component with the aim of planning the study with, and undertaking trainings of, community groups so that the new knowledge, tools, and overall philosophy of the intervention will become permanent community resources once the study ends.

“The intervention targets reducing sexual risk behavior.”

The AIDS Fund: Supporting HIV/AIDS related organizations across the city of Philadelphia.



The AIDS Fund Logo

The AIDS Fund was founded in 1987 when volunteers from Philadelphia's gay and lesbian community center, Penguin Place (now known as the William Way Center), organized the first AIDS Walk to raise money for local AIDS organizations. The first walk raised \$33,000 --last year's AIDS Walk raised over \$850,000. Altogether since 1987 the Fund has distributed more than \$8 million dollars to organizations in the Philadelphia area that provide HIV/AIDS related services, education, and prevention programs.

Today the AIDS Fund, which is located at 1227 Locust Street, raises money throughout the year, in a variety of forums. Besides the annual AIDS Walk, the Fund sponsors a workplace fund-raising drive. One of its most popular fundraising events is the monthly Gay Bingo game at the Gershman Y at Broad and Pine Streets. Not only do the games raise much needed funds, but those attending are guaranteed to have a fantastic time. Prizes range from \$100 to \$1000, and even if you don't win, you will be sure to have a great time as hostess Carlota Ttendant, one of the city's most famous drag queens, keeps the players in stitches with her wicked wit and humor. Should you hit bingo, your card will be checked by one of the fabulous BVDs--Bingo Verifying Divas--who patrol the hall on in-line skates.

Another AIDS Fund fundraising program is called "A Mother's Pledge" and is made up of mothers who have lost a child to HIV/AIDS or have a child living with HIV/AIDS. The group provides speakers for fundraising campaigns, as well as educational forums such as churches, schools, and workplaces.

The Fund is also involved in the annual World AIDS Day/Day With(out) Art. The event is held on December 1st and links AIDS services providers, cultural organizations, and businesses in an

effort to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. A variety of cultural programs are presented and participants conduct a candlelight march and vigil.

Grants from the AIDS Fund are handled by the Fund's Allocation Committee. The Allocation Committee, which decides which applications to fund, is made up of members from diverse racial, ethnic, and professional groups. When making a funding decision the committee looks at factors such as the likely benefits to people living with HIV/AIDS, the need of the group to be served as well as the strategy to address the need, and the effectiveness of the organization. The committee also considers the importance of targeting high-risk, under-served populations.

The AIDS Fund is always in need of volunteers so if you have some free time and want to help a great cause this is your chance.

For more information about the AIDS Fund or to volunteer call (215) 731-9255.

"Last year's AIDS Walk raised over \$850,000."

*Source: AIDS Fund website:
<http://www.aidsfundphilly.org/>*

Harm Reduction Coalition looking for articles, essays and art work for Fall 2001 issue of Harm Reduction Communication

The following e-mail was sent out to the DRCNet Harm Reduction Forum:
For the Fall 2001 issue of Harm Reduction Communication, we are actively seeking articles, essays, interviews, and reporting, up to 4000 words in length.

We invite drug users (and ex-users) to submit pieces based on experience: personal & political. We are especially interested in hearing from people on the front lines, be it on the street, in prison, or in drug treatment programs. Please encourage your program's participants to submit something and/or submit something yourself. We want to hear about your lives!

We want it all! Personal accounts describing encounters with social service agencies, health care and treatment providers, the criminal justice system, public health bureaucracies, etc. and/or creative & provocative explorations of programs that really work (especially drug treatment and housing and healthcare series for active users), the prison-industrial complex, the role of active drug users in the harm reduction field, the relationship between harm reduction and drug policy reform & whatever else is on your mind. "How to" information that service recipients can use to improve the quality of their lives: safer use info, tips on accessing services, use management techniques. We are also seeking artwork.

Our deadline for submissions is June 15, 2001. Do you need technical assistance? We will help. Please send submissions in electronic format to:

pcherash@harmreduction.org. Alternatively you can mail them to the below address. Please call or email if you have any questions, or need assistance.

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Conference Announcement "Health, Law and Human Rights: Exploring the Connections"

An important international conference is coming to Philadelphia this fall. The conference, titled "Health, Law and Human Rights: Exploring the Connections" will be held at the Sheraton Society Hill Hotel between September 29th and October 1st, 2001. Professor Scott Burris of Temple Law School, a leading authority on health law, and expert on legal issues related to syringe exchange, was involved in putting the conference together.

The conference will feature leaders in the fields of public health, law, research, and administration including Lawrence Gostin, Ichiro Kawachi, Sevgi Aral, Paul Farmer, Michael Grodin, Barbara Krimgold, and Glifford Shearing. The conference will explore such issues as: how law and human rights are related to the public's health; how human rights and legal strategies can effectively promote public health; how advocates, researchers and policy makers can use human rights as a framework for addressing structural causes of health and illness; where the health and human rights movement goes in the future.

The conference is being funded by the American Foundation on AIDS Research (amFar) and presented by the American Society of Law, Medicine & Ethics (ASLME), Temple Law School, Temple Medical School, and Georgetown University Law Center, in cooperation with the Franxois-Xavier

Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Scholarships are available.

For more information contact:

ASLME (617) 262-4990.

Source: Conference website

<http://aslme.org/humanrights2001/>



Professor Scott Burris of
Temple Law School

*"The conference
will feature
leaders in the
field of public
health."*

In The News.

U.S. Representative Barney Frank Reintroduces Legislation to Legalize Medical Marijuana

(courtesy DRCNet <http://www.drcnet.org>)

Washington, DC: Representative Barney Frank (D-MA) reintroduced legislation on Tuesday this week (4/3) in the 107th Congress to provide for the medical use of marijuana. The bill is titled the "States' Rights to Medical Marijuana Act."

"People who are suffering from severe or terminal illnesses who find a measure of relief from marijuana ought to be able to use it without being treated like criminals," Frank announced. "This bill offers an opportunity for my conservative colleagues to decide if they really want to be consistent on the question of states' rights or if they think the federal government should tell states what to do."

The legislation states:

"No provision of the Controlled Substances Act [or]... the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act shall prohibit or otherwise restrict --

(A) the prescription or recommendation of marijuana by a physician for medical use,

(B) an individual from obtaining and using marijuana from a prescription or recommendation of marijuana by a physician for medical use by such individual, or

(C) a pharmacy from obtaining and holding marijuana for the prescription of marijuana by a physician for medical use under applicable state law in a State in which marijuana may be prescribed or recommended by a physician for medical use under

applicable State law."

The legislation reschedules marijuana from Schedule I to Schedule II under federal law. This reclassification properly recognizes marijuana's medical utility and enables physicians to legally prescribe it under controlled circumstances while maintaining restrictions on recreational use.

Since 1996, nine states -- Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon and Washington -- have implemented laws allowing seriously ill patients to possess and use medical

marijuana under a doctor's supervision. While these laws protect patients from state criminal marijuana penalties, they do not shield patients from federal prosecution, nor do they allow a state legislature to legally distribute medical marijuana. The legislation introduced in Congress today would afford patients legal protection under federal law, and permit those states that wish to establish medical marijuana distribution systems the legal authority to do so.

NORML Executive Director R. Keith Stroup called the proposal a streamlined effort to get marijuana to those who require it. "Historically, voters and state legislatures have been more receptive to the medical marijuana issue than the federal government," Stroup explained. "This legislation addresses this paradigm and effectively gets the federal government out of the way of those states that wish to make marijuana available as a medicine."

Stroup said that the Supreme Court's apparent skepticism regarding whether patients or medical marijuana providers may legally raise the defense of "medical necessity" in federal marijuana cases makes the need to reform federal law more pertinent than ever. "Judging from the questions raised by several of the justices, it appears likely the Supreme Court may reject the medical necessity defense in federal cases," he said. "Therefore, passage of this legislation by Congress is crucial. It will enact federal protections to safeguard patients who are using marijuana medicinally under their doctor's supervision, and will provide an opportunity for states to establish their own legal, regulated medical marijuana distribution systems to supply medicine to those who need it."

Joining Frank in support of this act are: Reps. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), John Conyers (D-MI), Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), John Olver (D-MA), Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Pete Stark (D-CA), and Lynn Woolsey (D-CA).

Quote of the Month.

"Poverty is the worst form of violence."

Mahatma Gandhi



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Raising Awareness About
Public Health