

Daily Roundup from the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada Tuesday, August 15, 2006

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton called the trend in new infections of HIV “alarming” at a session about leadership at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada on Tuesday. While his foundation has focused much of its efforts on expanding access to treatment and care, Clinton reaffirmed his support for expanded testing.

“I just don’t believe we can reverse this if we keep having more people infected every year than we are increasing the number of people on medication,” said Clinton. “And if we keep having 90% of the people not knowing their status I don’t see how we can do that. Just as no government organization can win the fight against AIDS alone, prevention care and treatment are intertwined. And we cannot realize universal treatment, and I’ll say again, let alone stop AIDS unless we also see prevention as a part of a mutually dependent strategy.”

At the same session U.N. Special Envoy to Africa Stephen Lewis mourned the lives already lost to AIDS. “That’s a matter of excruciating pain and unconscionable political neglect about which historians will one day write,” said Lewis. “And nothing will stand out more in the judgment of history than the toll on women old and young.”

While microbicides have received much attention here at the conference as a way from women to protect themselves from HIV, other methods include diaphragms and female condoms as well sexually transmitted infection control.

While there are high expectations for new prevention tools, IAS President and CEO of CARE USA Helene Gayle noted that even current prevention methods are still out of reach to many.

“For every person currently receiving treatment about 4 people became infected in the last year alone. So we must urgently accelerate access to prevention tools that we know are already available,” said Gayle. “In addition we must accelerate the development of a new generation of prevention approaches and assure that once they’re available and we know that they are effective that we do all within our power to make them accessible to those who need them the most as soon as possible.”

Cristina Pimenta of the Brazilian Interdisciplinary AIDS Association cautioned against relying on new prevention approaches as a “magic solution.” “With all these advances in prevention technologies, we have to be careful not to go for medicalization of prevention,” said Pimenta. “Because even with these technologies we’re talking about people and we’re talking about behavior and attitudes.”

The media can play a role in shifting the public’s outlook on HIV/AIDS according to actor and activist Richard Gere. With storylines that help viewers empathize with those affected by HIV/AIDS entertainment can help reduce stigma.

“That to me is the important thing that media can do and is unique in many ways to what we can offer,” said Gere. Equally as powerful, he said, are messages that inform and educate media consumers about how to protect themselves from contracting HIV.

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