Conclusions from Swiss study questioned

Earlier this year a Eurosurveillance news article reported on a joint statement issued by the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the importance of using condoms as a protection against HIV [1,2]. This statement came in the wake of a paper published by the Swiss Federal Commission for HIV/AIDS which suggested that subject to certain preconditions HIV-positive individuals may be able to have sexual intercourse with their seronegative partners without risk of transmitting the virus [3]. The preconditions were that the HIV-positive partner should have an undetectable blood viral load for at least 6 months, adhere to an effective antiretroviral treatment regimen and be free of other sexually transmitted diseases.

The Swiss conclusions have now been questioned by the results of a study by Australian scientists published in the Lancet [4]. Using a model-based analysis, they estimated the cumulative risk of HIV transmission from effectively treated HIV-infected patients (HIV RNA <10 copies per mL) over a prolonged period. They concluded that in a population of 10,000 serodiscordant partners over a 10-year period the expected number of seroconversions occurring if the partners had unprotected sex would correspond to a fourfold increase in incidence when compared with incidence under current rates of condom use.

A further cautionary note was sounded by Geoffrey Garnett, an epidemiologist at Imperial College London, who advocates the concurrent use of condoms and antiretrovirals, citing also concerns about the risk of spread of other sexually transmitted diseases [5].

References

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