CDC HIV/AIDS/Viral Hepatitis/STD/TB Prevention News Update

PHILADELPHIA: Univ. Contributes to AIDS Awareness

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In recognition of HIV/AIDS Awareness Month, researchers from the Drexel University College of Medicines Division of Infectious Disease and HIV Medicine outlined their HIV/AIDS research and prevention activities. Three HIV research approaches exist: kill HIV-infected cells, re-educate the immune system, or make cells resist HIV, according to university researchers. The primary research emphasis of the Drexel team is to re-educate the immune system and find a functional cure, similar to the way the human immune system controls the chicken pox virus, explained Jeffrey M. Jacobson, MD. To accomplish this definitive solution, the team is attempting to keep infection from entering cells using antibodies against HIV. The outcome of the research would be vaccines or immune-based therapies that assist the immune system in controlling HIV infections. The Drexel team is also working with the University of Pennsylvania on research to make cells resistant to HIV infection. This study focuses on helping HIV-infected patients by loading their lymphocytes with genes that help the cells resist the virus. The prevention aspects of the Drexel teams efforts include working in the community to identify HIV-infected individuals and connect them to care or return them to care. Stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS also focuses on helping individuals with drug and alcohol problems, which interfere with HIV/AIDS treatment. Jacobson recommended routine HIV/AIDS testing for people ages 18 to 65. The Drexel HIV/AIDS care program is the largest in Philadelphia. Funded by the National Institutes of Health, the program includes a team of clinicians, social workers, psychiatrists, pharmacists, nutritionists, and other disciplines. Other HIV/AIDS researchers take a third approach that is based on interrupting HIVs replicating cycle by identifying the cells that contain a latent HIV infection in memory-retaining T cells.

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