

HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies

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2. Overview

The HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University has been continuously funded since 1987 with a center grant from NIMH and numerous individual research and training grants. Now in its 20th year, the HIV Center is one of the oldest and most productive continuously funded AIDS research centers in the United States. HIV Center research focuses on studying sexual risk behavior and gender in order to design effective interventions to reduce risk for HIV infection among children and adolescents, heterosexual women and men, persons who engage in same-sex behavior, and people with mental illness. In addition, our work aims to help HIV-positive individuals cope with HIV infection in ways such as improving their mental health, accessing medical care, and adhering to medication regimens. In all of our research, we are committed to reaching the populations that are at highest risk and, thus, ethnically diverse and often disenfranchised. The HIV Center's research program is supported by an infrastructure of seven Cores: the Administrative Core (Core Director: Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD), the Interdisciplinary Research Methods Core (Core Director: Heino Meyer-Bahlburg, Dr rer nat), the Statistics, Epidemiology, and Data Management Core (Core Director: Bruce Levin, PhD), the Community Collaboration Core (Core Director: Robert Remien, PhD), the Research Capacity Development Core (Core Director: Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD), the International Core (Core Director: Richard Parker, PhD), and the Ethics, Policy, and Human Rights Core (Core Director: Robert Klitzman, MD). In conducting HIV Center research, we collaborate with over 50 institutions and departments, including 11 other departments and schools of

Columbia University, 33 other institutions in the US, and nine institutions in six countries outside of the US.

- The HIV Center submitted a successful competitive five-year renewal application with NIMH in 2007 with the theme of “Meeting the Challenges of Global AIDS at the Intersection of Gender, Sexuality, and Mental Health.”
- HIV Center Director Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD, was an invited participant in a workshop convened by the NIH Office of AIDS Research, NIMH, and NIAID to promote dialogue and outline a research agenda on HIV/AIDS in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The meeting, held in May 2007 in Tunisia, included scientists, providers, government and policy representatives, and care managers from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia as well as US researchers and NIH staff.
- HIV Center Investigator Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD, was appointed Professor of Clinical Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry effective July, 2007.
- HIV Center investigator Claude Ann Mellins, PhD, was elected to the Executive Committee of the Pediatric HIV/AIDS Cohort Study (PHACS) and directs the Neurodevelopment and Behavior Domain on the PHACS Scientific Leadership Committee.
- New York State Governor Elliot Spitzer appointed HIV Center investigator Robert Klitzman, MD, to the Ethics Committee of the Empire State Stem Cell Board.
- The New York/New Jersey AIDS Education and Training Center (NY/NJ AETC), was transferred to the HIV Center under the leadership of Francine Cournos, MD.
- The MAC AIDS Fund awarded the HIV Center a two-year grant under the leadership of Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD, and Thomas Coates, PhD, to establish the MAC AIDS Fund Leadership Initiative at Columbia University and UCLA, which will identify and train emerging South African leaders in HIV/AIDS prevention.
- HIV Center investigator Joanne Mantell, PhD, received a grant from NIMH to develop a multi-level structural intervention to integrate sexual and reproductive health services into HIV clinical care for HIV-positive adults in Cape Town, South Africa.
- HIV Center investigators Joanne Mantell, PhD, and Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD, received grants from the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) for studies addressing the role of heterosexual anal intercourse in HIV transmission.
- HIV Center investigator Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD, was awarded a grant from the Microbicide Trials Network to evaluate young HIV-negative women’s opinions of a

candidate microbicidal gel to prevent HIV infection as well as a supplement from the NIMH Office of AIDS Research to study how HIV-negative women might make use of a home-based rapid HIV test for risk management.

- HIV Center investigator Robert Remien, PhD, was awarded a grant from amfAR to partner with local departments of health and community based organizations to raise awareness of acute HIV infection in high risk communities.
- HIV Center investigator Robert Remien, PhD, received a grant from NIMH to work with the Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning to develop a multimedia intervention based on his proven intervention employing social support to improve adherence to HIV medication regimens that will be adapted for HIV+ adults in South Africa.
- HIV Center investigator Claude Ann Mellins, PhD, was awarded a grant from NIMH to adapt a family-based intervention to improve medical adherence among HIV-positive youth to the South African context.
- Milton Wainberg, MD, received a grant from NIMH to conduct a randomized control trial in Brazil testing the long-term efficacy of the HIV prevention intervention among people with severe mental illness.
- Robert Klitzman, MD, was funded by NHGRI to study the role of Institutional Review Boards in assuring integrity of HIV-related and other research.
- The Lloyd Foundation funded the HIV Center to co-sponsor an “HIV/AIDS and Gender Think Tank” to be held in Cairo in advance of the 2008 International AIDS Conference in Mexico City.
- HIV Center investigator Theo Sandfort, PhD, organized and convened the first conference in South Africa focusing on the role of homosexuality in HIV transmission in that country.
- The HIV Center inaugurated an online *E-Newsletter*, replacing the previous hard copy edition which had been published since 1991.

3. Current Research

HIV Center research addresses six themes, as outlined below.

Gender-Specific Interventions for Women and Their Male Partners: New methods and technologies are critical to enabling women and their partners to protect themselves against HIV/STDs. NIMH is supporting Theresa Exner, PhD, to conduct a large-scale structural intervention promoting use of the female condom in agencies supported by the NYSDOH AIDS Institute. In South Africa, Joanne Mantell, PhD, is conducting an NICHD-funded

study of attitudes and practices related to the female condom among women university students and their male partners. With a grant from NIMH, Dr. Mantell has also begun work in South Africa to develop and test a multi-level structural intervention integrating sexual and reproductive health services into HIV clinical care for HIV-positive adults. Funded by amfAR, Dr. Mantell is also investigating the role of anal intercourse in heterosexual HIV transmission, studying the prevalence, frequency, meaning, social dynamics, and contexts of anal sex practices among men and women in South Africa.

Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD, has received funding from the Microbicides Trials Network (MTN) to conduct a study in collaboration with the Adolescent Trials Network for HIV/AIDS Interventions (ATN) to evaluate the safety, acceptability and ease of use of a microbicide candidate in sexually active, HIV-negative young women who are participating in the MTN Phase I trial at two ATN study sites. With supplemental support from the NIH Office of AIDS Research, Dr. Carballo-Diéguez is also studying how HIV-negative women might use a rapid HIV home test to determine the HIV status of sexual partners, thus managing risk.

With an R01 grant from NIMH, Jennifer Hirsch, PhD, is exploring HIV risk within the context of marriage in rural Mexico. Robert Remien, PhD, is working with Nabila El-Bassel, DSW, on several NIH-supported initiatives on women and their male partners, including a multisite intervention to reduce STD/HIV risk for African American couples in the United States.

The Lloyd Foundation has funded the HIV Center to sponsor an “HIV/AIDS and Gender Think Tank” to be held in Cairo in March 2008. Co-sponsored with the UCLA Program in Global Health, the Think Tank will provide a venue for identifying cutting edge work on the role of gender in the global AIDS epidemic in advance of the 2008 International AIDS Conference in Mexico City.

Children, Adolescents, and Families: With support from a grant from NIMH, Claude Ann Mellins, PhD, is documenting mental health and HIV risk among HIV-positive children and seroreverters in collaboration with four New York City hospitals: New York Presbyterian Hospital, Harlem Hospital Center, Metropolitan Hospital, and Jacobi Medical Center. She is also collaborating on an NIMH-funded study to develop a family-based intervention for pre- and early adolescent perinatally HIV-infected youth and their adult caregivers in urban pediatric AIDS clinics. In recognition of her expertise, Dr. Mellins has been elected to the Executive Committee of the Pediatric HIV/AIDS Cohort Study (PHACS) and directs the Neurodevelopment and Behavior Domain on the PHACS Scientific Leadership Committee.

Sexual Risk in the Context of Same-Sex Behavior: Whereas microbicides are usually considered for use by women in the context of heterosexual (penile-vaginal) sex, Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD, addresses their potential for protection in anal intercourse, particularly among men who have sex with men (MSM). With an R01 grant from NICHD, he is conducting an acceptability trial of microbicides for HIV prevention among MSM while also exploring the acceptability of microbicides among women who engage in anal

intercourse. Dr. Carballo-Diéguez has also recently received funding from amfAR to examine acceptability and use of devices for delivery of a rectal microbicide.

With an R01 grant from NIMH, Dr. Carballo-Diéguez is completing a descriptive study of US MSM who meet sexual partners through the Internet to intentionally engage in high-risk sex. Also supported by NIMH, Dr. Carballo-Diéguez is working with partners from the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, to identify and describe cognitive, socio-cultural, and contextual predictors of HIV-related risk behavior; patterns and mediators of HIV testing; and prevalence of HIV among MSM in Buenos Aires.

People Living with HIV Infection: The HIV Center is part of a consortium of NIMH-funded AIDS research centers conducting behavioral research on acute HIV infection to better understand the social and psychological context of recent HIV transmission and to assess sexual behavior, substance use, and psychological state of individuals with acute infection.

Building on her work among Caribbean populations in New York City, Susie Hoffman, DrPH, is evaluating a peer-support program conducted by the Community Healthcare Network, with support from HRSA, to promote use of primary HIV medical care services by HIV-positive Caribbeans living in Brooklyn.

Robert Klitzman, MD, has extended his work on HIV-related stigma and disclosure to HIV-positive health care providers to explore the impact of their health status on communication with and clinical care of patients. This work led to a study on privacy and disclosure of genetic diseases, “Views of Privacy of Genetic Information,” and another studying the role of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) in observing, monitoring, and responding to research integrity issues in HIV-related and other areas, both funded by NHGRI.

Religious organizations have been central to the response of HIV/AIDS since the very beginning of the epidemic, and the impact of religion and religious organizations in relation to HIV/AIDS has been powerful in Brazil. With funding from NICHD, Richard Parker, PhD, and his team are developing a comparative analysis of the multiple ways in which various religions have responded to HIV/AIDS in Brazil.

Mental Illness and Mental Health: Mental illness and mental health are intricately interwoven with sexual risk both for uninfected populations as well as for persons already living with HIV. Supported by a grant from NIMH, Milton Wainberg, MD, and Robert Remien, PhD, are collaborating with researchers, mental health care providers, and local departments of health in Brazil to test an intervention to reduce risk behavior among patients with serious mental illness.

The HIV Center has supported the work of the Special Needs Clinic, founded in 1992 by former HIV Center fellows, Dr. Mellins and Jennifer Havens, MD, as a part of the Pediatric Psychiatry Service at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. Currently the largest specialized family-based program in New York City providing comprehensive mental health services to children and families affected by HIV and substance abuse, the clinic has treated over 1,500

children, adolescents, and adult family members who are HIV-infected or living in families with HIV-infected and/or drug-addicted family members.

Basic Studies in Development of Gender and Sexuality: In line with the HIV Center's focus on gender and sexuality, the research program of Heino Meyer-Bahlburg, Dr rer nat, on the psychobiology of gender and sexuality development includes NICHD-funded projects investigating the long-term behavioral masculinization brought about by androgen excess in 46,XX individuals with congenital adrenal hyperplasia and the effects of the suppression of such excess androgen production with prenatal glucocorticoid treatment. Dr. Meyer-Bahlburg leads the Gender-Outcome Site of a new international study of rare genetic steroid disorders, including a variety of intersex disorders, conducted in US, Brazilian, Canadian, and French clinics.

4. Education and Training

The HIV Center is the site of a variety of training activities supported by a number of training grants. These programs attract pre- and postdoctoral fellows, medical residents, graduate students, and Visiting Scientists from institutions in the US and abroad; and the HIV Center has developed a comprehensive training agenda to accommodate their interests and training needs.

The postdoctoral training program, “Behavioral Sciences Research Training in HIV Infection,” was first funded by NIMH in 1989 and, over the last 18 years, has evolved both in its focus and in the complement of fellows it has trained. Of the 53 fellows who have graduated from the program, 17 have been ethnic minority researchers and 26 have been women. Almost 90% have remained in academia or public health fields, and over 80% are working in HIV-related fields. Recognizing the increasing need for HIV behavioral researchers with expertise in the science of sexuality and gender, Program Director Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD, and Training Director Theo Sandfort, PhD, have focused the training program on state-of-the-art, intensive theoretical and methodological training in human sexuality research with an emphasis on applied problems in HIV prevention.

The HIV Center is also home to the New York/New Jersey AIDS Education and Training Center (NY/NJ AETC). Under the leadership of Francine Cournos, MD, the NY/NJ AETC has the primary aims of identifying and responding to HIV clinical care providers' prevention, diagnosis and clinical management training needs; increasing the number of clinicians in the NY/NJ region who are competent and willing to provide HIV/AIDS clinical treatment; building community capacity for HIV treatment in minority communities and promote culturally competent care; and systematically evaluating program activities and disseminating best practices. The AETC sustains a regionally coordinated education and training program that promotes collaboration and ensures high quality curricula and rapid dissemination of information.

Since 1993, HIV Center faculty have worked with the Columbia-Southern Africa Fogarty AIDS International Training and Research Program (AITRP), which provides training for

fellows from South Africa, Namibia, and Lesotho in the epidemiology, behavioral and basic sciences, and ethics of HIV. Formal degree training takes place at the School of Public Health, and both Mailman and HIV Center faculty (e.g., Drs. Ehrhardt, Susser, Bayer, Collins, Hoffman, and Remien) provide training in epidemiology, prevention, and human sexuality. At the HIV Center, AITRP fellows participate in sexuality and gender research training activities and in collaborative research projects. Drs. Ehrhardt, Stein, Susser, Hoffman, Remien, and Bayer are also mentors or members of the AITRP's Executive or Steering Committees.

Led by Nabila El-Bassel, DSW, the HIV Intervention Science Training Program for Minority Investigators – based at the Social Intervention Group at Columbia University School of Social Work in collaboration with the HIV Center (Alex Carballo-Diéguez, PhD), the Columbia Center for Homelessness, and the Columbia Center for the Health of Urban Minorities – facilitates the growth and development of a cadre of racial/ethnic minority (REM) scientists who are starting research programs focusing on disparities in HIV/AIDS and co-occurring mental health disorders.

Columbia University Medical Center's Clinical and Translational Science Award program uses the culture of clinical and translational research to develop and retain an outstanding cadre of senior faculty to lead the next generation of clinical and translational investigators at the Irving Institute for Clinical and Translational Research (ICTR). ICTR senior faculty (Robert Klitzman, MD) provide leadership and mentorship for junior faculty and trainees who are developing novel approaches to address barriers to multi- and interdisciplinary clinical and translational research.

There is a critical need to catalyze and encourage emerging leadership in HIV/AIDS prevention within countries hard hit by the epidemic. To this end, the HIV Center is directing the MAC AIDS Fund Leadership Initiative in collaboration with the Global Health Program at UCLA. Underwritten by the MAC AIDS Fund, the Leadership Initiative provides one year of training, in both New York and South Africa, to build the capacity of emerging leaders in South Africa who can make major contributions to HIV/AIDS prevention advocacy at the local, regional, or national levels.

Other Training Activities. HIV Center faculty participate in a range of other training activities focusing on interns, medical students, psychiatry residents, and fellows at NYSPI. Drs. Ehrhardt and Exner teach the human sexuality course for psychiatry residents; Dr. Meyer-Bahlburg directs the developmental sexology course for child psychiatry residents; Dr. Exner teaches medical students and psychiatry residents in conducting sexual behavior assessments; and Drs. Carballo-Diéguez and Remien collaborate with Dr. Exner in teaching cultural sensitivity in sexual behavior assessment.

5. Awards/Honors

Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD, was an Invited Presenter for The Frontiers of Science Lecture

Series, at the American Psychiatric Association, presenting her talk, "The Discourse on Human Sexuality in the Time of AIDS," in Toronto, Canada.

Anke A. Ehrhardt, PhD, received the First Annual Champions of Sexual Literacy Award, "In Recognition of Outstanding Research in Sexuality," from the National Sexuality Research Center and Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality in San Francisco, California.

Claude Ann Mellins, PhD, was elected to the Executive Committee of the Pediatric HIV/AIDS Cohort Study (PHACS).

Heino F.L. Meyer-Bahlburg, Dr. rer. nat., was an invited participant at the Meeting of the European Scientific Advisory Board of the German Network on Intersexuality in Lubeck, Germany.

Heino F. L. Meyer-Bahlburg, Dr. rer. nat., became a member of the Standards of Care Workgroup of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health.

Theresa Exner, PhD, received the John Dondero Alumni Award from La Salle University.

Joyce Hunter, DSW, received a Special New York City Council Proclamation as Spokesperson for the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights at the 20th anniversary of the passing of the NYC Gay Rights Bill.

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