

Sex, Drugs, and Viral Load:
Integrating HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment

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Presentation at the National Institutes of Health

Behavioral and Social Sciences Research Lecture Series

January 22, 2009

Abstract

Effective treatments for HIV infection demand high levels of adherence and people infected with HIV are expected to adhere to safer sex and drug use practices throughout their lives. Treatment non-adherence overlaps with continued unsafe sexual practices for some people living with HIV/AIDS. The co-occurrence of non-adherence and HIV transmission risk behavior poses particular risk for the spread of drug resistant variants of HIV. There are common correlates of both non-adherence and risk behavior, particularly substance use and depression. In addition, successful HIV treatment may reduce perceptions of HIV infectiousness, leading to increased risk behaviors and paradoxically greater infectiousness when patients are co-infected with other sexually transmitted infections. Interventions designed to address treatment non-adherence and those designed to reduce risk behavior also share common elements, particularly self-efficacy enhancement and behavioral skills training. The common correlates and shared intervention elements suggest that integrated intervention approaches that simultaneously address HIV treatment adherence and risk reduction may be feasible.