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Trends. Controlling AIDS Through Control

Editor

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Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) poses an increasingly dire threat for politics, economics, culture, and the very social fabric of an expanding list of countries. To help meet the threat, some public-health officials have posited the benefits of controlling AIDS through control—i.e., by reinforcing through public-education programs the belief that people are in control of their own behavior and can, therefore, control the incidence and prevalence of AIDS.

There are some problems with such an approach. Individuals who already are positive for a variant of the virus that is thought to cause AIDS may experience combinations of guilt, anger, anxiety, and depression contributing to a lowered quality of life for the time they have left. Some may act out psychological conflict involving these emotions by purposefully engaging in risky behavior with others who may not be infected.

Individuals who may not be HIV positive may develop the same emotional combinations by finding that they are, indeed, less in control of such powerfully reinforcing behaviors as sex and the self-administration of drugs. This development may lead to risky behavior through believing that, since control has been lost at least momentarily and one's risk status has increased, perhaps lethally, one may as well continue to engage in risky behavior. In this way, one is in control by not being in control.


(Keywords: AIDS, Control, Epidemic, HIV, Public Health, STD.)