BENEFITS OF EARLY INITIATION OF ANTIRETROVIRAL THERAPY

STUDY PUBLISHES RESULTS

With the advent of antiretroviral therapy (ART) in the 1990s, HIV/AIDS is no longer considered a death sentence and has become a treatable chronic disease. However, there is still debate on when is the best time to start treatment. Traditionally, doctors have been guided by the CD4+ lymphocytes white blood cell count. The criteria to start therapy for CD4+ lymphocytes varies over time (<500 cells/mm3 <200 <350 <500). Some countries, like the United States, choose to recommend therapy to all HIV-positive people. In order to determine the best moment to begin ART, the study Strategic Timing of AntiRetroviral Treatment (START) was designed.

START is sponsored by the University of Minnesota with primary funding from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) of the United States and several other research institutions in different countries. START is the largest study for people living with HIV. There are 4688 patients from 233 centers in 35 countries on six continents. The volunteers entered the study with CD4+ cell counts >500 cells/mm3 and were randomized to start treatment immediately (early group) or wait until the CD4+ cell count decreased to <350 cells/mm3 (delayed group). In Peru, we count on the participation of four centers, the Asociación Civil Impacta Salud y Educación (IMPACTA), the Asociación Vía Libre, the Hospital Guillermo Almenara Irigoyen, and the Hospital Edgardo Rebagliati Martins, bringing our participant total to 215 patients.

After following participants for more than three years, it was determined that AIDS-related events (mainly tuberculosis, Kaposi’s sarcoma and non-Hodgkin lymphoma), non-AIDS events (cancer and myocardial infarction), and death was reduced by 53% in the early group as compared to those in the delayed group. On May 15, 2015, the independent committee that periodically assesses the results determined that the study had answered the main question that early treatment was better, and patients who were not receiving ART in the study received the recommendation to begin treatment. The results of the START study serve as solid evidence that will allow authorities, the medical and scientific community, and others involved in combatting the HIV/AIDS epidemic, to redefine the standard start treatment for HIV/AIDS globally.

The study will continue for 18 months to better understand the long-term effects of treatment. At that time, a series of secondary analyses of the study START and its sub-studies will be completed. In addition to the direct health benefits of early therapy for the patient, early treatment of HIV reduces the likelihood of HIV transmission to the uninfected population by reducing viral load. If all people living with HIV receive treatment, it is expected that this will help decrease and eventually end the HIV epidemic that currently affects more than 32 million people worldwide. Preliminary START results support this, and the next step in the battle against HIV/AIDS will be to identify all people living with HIV and treat them early.
We congratulate Lic. Patricia Segura, Head of Community Engagement Unit and recent winner of the 2015 Service Award, presented on Wednesday, May 6th at the last conference of the HIV Vaccine Trial Network (HVTN). This award recognizes her invaluable work as a leader and health professional to make the HIV vaccine possible.

Congratulations Patty!

WE PARTICIPATE IN...

Interview ANP

Daniel Alva, psychologist and mentor for our institution, was invited on Wednesday, May 13rd by the National Association of Journalists to discuss the theme: “Let's talk about HIV/AIDS” on the radio program “On the Table”. During the meeting, they discussed the terminology, definitions, statistics, processing, treatment and prevention of HIV in Peru.

Candlelight 2015

We were invited for the second year to help organize the "International AIDS Candlelight Memorial", an event that was held on Sunday, May 17th. The event commemorates the deaths of thousands of women, men and children from the virus and gives hope and promotes solidarity to all people living with HIV and their loved ones.

Tour of Heroes

On Saturday, May 23rd, we returned to the main clubs of Lima with our popular hero EXA-MAN, who invites us to test for HIV periodically. EXA-MAN lit up the night dancing with the public and sending important messages of prevention and awareness for our community. See you next month!
While my time at Asociación Civil Impacta Salud y Educación (Impacta) has been short, it will be an experience in my life that I will never forget. My role at Impacta has been a little different than previous visiting students as I was not conducting my own research study. However, through the help of my colleagues and this unique hand on experience, I gained considerable knowledge and skills regarding the HIV epidemic in Lima, Peru and the remarkable work being done by Impacta to combat this epidemic. Little did I ever know that working with the Retention and Recruitment Team would be such a pleasure and become my home away from home.

My main role during my time here at Impacta was to examine how the tutoring program works in the SABES study, a study for HIV testing and treatment to prevent onward HIV transmission among men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women. In step III of the study, tutors assist the HIV-infected participants in making better use of available resources and developing effective communication with their medical providers. In my personal opinion, the tutors working for the SABES study are very philanthropically driven and are incredibly kind hearted and passionate about their work.

In addition to working with the tutors in the office, I have interviewed and observed them to help produce qualitative data, attended weekly meetings with the tutors, helped prepare for the Tour of Heroes, attended education/health fairs, updated databases, and accomplished other miscellaneous tasks. From coding and data entry to Skype meetings and interactive educational sessions, I learned something new every day that I know I will use later during my Master of Public Health (MPH) program or in my future career.

I personally want to thank Dr. Ann Duerr, Patricia Segura, Dr. Robert De La Grecca, Lucho Castro, Gonzalo Meneses, Miguel Chirre, Medalith Sulca, Daniel Alva, Noelia Niño, Pilar Mezarina, and Yolanda Vidal for making me a part of your amazing team. It has been an honor to work with such motiving, inspiring, and intelligent people. You will always hold a special place in my heart.

An enjoyable experience

Alex Troyer
Scholarship student of the "Eastern Washington University"
Contest "Join the team VACUMAN"

Throughout the month of May, under the "International Day of awareness of HIV Vaccine", we promoted the "Join the Team VACUMAN" campaign, where we invited our staff, our employees, and the general public to raise public awareness about the importance of participating in a study to help find a vaccine that effectively protects us against HIV by taking a picture with the shield of our hero VACUMAN. Thank you to all participants for helping to make the campaign successful!