



Update

October 27, 1988

Elaine Baldwin
(301) 496-5717

RISING HIV INFECTION IN ZAIRIAN HOSPITAL WORKERS DUE TO HETEROSEXUAL SPREAD, NOT OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE

A high and increasing prevalence of HIV infection among hospital workers in Kinshasa, Zaire, indicates how the virus is spreading in the general community. HIV infection in Kinshasa hospital employees is apparently unrelated to occupational exposure.

NIAID scientist Dr. Thomas C. Quinn and his colleagues at Project SIDA in Kinshasa reported this finding in the New England Journal of Medicine, October 27, 1988. At the Stockholm AIDS meeting in June, Project SIDA investigators reported that more than 80 percent of new cases of HIV infection in Kinshasa are due to heterosexual activity,

"The Project SIDA studies give us an indication of how HIV progresses in a population of non-drug-abusing heterosexuals," Dr. Quinn said. "We in the United States must realize that no group can be complacent about the risks of HIV transmission. Changes in sexual practices are essential to prevent the spread of HIV."

Although AIDS is widely recognized as a burgeoning and potentially catastrophic health problem in some parts of Africa, little information exists on the rate of increase of HIV infection in various African countries. Present knowledge of the natural history of HIV infection is based almost entirely on studies of homosexual and bisexual males and intravenous drug abusers in developed countries.

Beginning in 1984, the investigators initiated a prospective study tracing the natural history of HIV infection in a cohort of more than 2000 employees at Kinshasa's Mama Yemo

(over)

Hospital, including physicians, nurses, and laboratory, clerical and manual workers. They found that HIV prevalence in this group as a whole rose from 6.4 percent to 8.7 percent between 1984 and 1986. Similar rates occurred in pregnant women attending an antenatal clinic and blood donors surveyed at other Kinshasa hospitals.

Based on these results, the Project SIDA investigators estimated that 32,000 persons in Kinshasa probably became newly infected with HIV during the two-year span. The total population of Kinshasa is approximately 3 million.

The 1984 Project SIDA study showed a correlation between HIV seropositivity and being young and unmarried or having had a blood transfusion. The followup study showed that prevalence rates did not vary according to type of employment at the hospital. HIV seropositivity was about the same for clerical workers with little patient contact and for physicians and lab workers with frequent exposure to AIDS patients and their body fluids. A relatively higher rate of infection among nurses, the authors concluded, was due not to hospital exposure but to being young, female and unmarried.

#