Aids 2 Essay, Research Paper

How Aids Has Affected Our Society

Today more Americans are infected with STD’s than at any other time in

history. The most serious of these diseases is AIDS. Since the first

cases were identified in the United States in 1981, AIDS has touched the

lives of millions of American families. This deadly disease is unlike

any other in modern history. Changes in social behavior can be directly

linked to AIDS. Its overall effect on society has been dramatic.

It is unknown whether AIDS and HIV existed and killed in the U.S. and

North America before the early 1970s. However in the early 1980s,

“deaths by opportunistic infections, previously observed mainly in

tissue-transplant recipients receiving immunosuppressive therapy”, were

recognized in otherwise healthy homosexual men. In 1983 French

oncologist Luc Montagnier and scientists at the Pasteur Institute in

Paris isolated what appeared to be a new human retrovirus from the lymph

node of a man at risk for having AIDS. At the same time, scientists

working in the laboratory of American research, scientist Robert Gallo

at the National Cancer Institute, one of the National Institutes of

Health in Bethesda, Maryland, and a group headed by American virologist

Jay Levy at the University of California at San Francisco isolated a

retrovirus from people with AIDS and from individuals having contact

with people with AIDS. All three groups of scientists had isolated what

is now known as HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

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In 1995 HIV was estimated to infect almost 20 million people worldwide,

and several million of those people had developed AIDS. The disease is

obviously an important social issue.

AIDS has caused many to rethink their own social behavior. People are

forced to use caution when involving themselves in sexual activity.

They must use contraception to avoid the dangers of infection. Many

people consider HIV infection and AIDS to be completely preventable

because the routes of HIV transmission are so well known. To completely

prevent transmission, however, dramatic changes in sexual behavior and

drug dependence would have to occur throughout the world. Prevention

efforts that promote sexual awareness through open discussion and condom

distribution in public schools have been opposed due to fear that these

efforts encourage sexual promiscuity among young adults. Similarly,

needle-exchange programs have been criticized as promoting drug abuse.

Governor Christine Todd Whitman vetoed a bill in New Jersey that tried

to create a needle-exchange program. She was accused of being

“compassionless”. She replied that she could not allow drug addicts to

continue to break the law. By distributing needles, she felt that she

was, in fact, encouraging them to break the law.

Prevention programs that identify HIV-infected individuals and notify

their sexual partners, as well as programs that promote HIV testing at

the time of marriage or pregnancy, have been criticized for invading

personal privacy.

Efforts aimed at public awareness have been propelled by

community-based organizations, such as Project Inform and Act-Up, that

provide current information to HIV-infected individuals and to

individuals at risk for infection. Public figures and celebrities who

are themselves

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HIV-infected or have died from AIDS-including American basketball player

Magic Johnson, American actor Rock Hudson, American diver Greg Louganis,

American tennis player Arthur Ashe, and British musician Freddie

Mercury-have personalized the disease of AIDS and have thereby helped

society come to terms with the enormity of the epidemic. In memory of

those people who died from AIDS, especially in the early years of the

epidemic, a giant quilt project was initiated in which each panel of the

quilt was dedicated to the memory of an individual AIDS death. This

quilt has traveled on display from community to community to promote

AIDS awareness.

The U.S. government has also attempted to assist HIV-infected

individuals through legislation and additional community-funding

measures. In 1990 HIV-infected people were included in the Americans

with Disabilities Act, making discrimination against these individuals

for jobs, housing, and other social benefits illegal. Additionally, a

community-funding program designed to assist in the daily lives of

people living with AIDS was established. This congressional act, the

Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act, was named in

memory of a young man who contracted HIV through blood products and

became a public figure for his courage in fighting the disease and

community prejudice. The act is still in place, although continued

funding for such social programs is under debate by current legislators.

The lack of effective vaccines and antiviral drugs has spurred

speculation that the funding for AIDS research is insufficient. Although

the actual amount of government funding for AIDS research is large, most

of these funds are used for expensive clinical studies to evaluate new

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drugs. Many scientists believe that not enough is known about the basic

biology of HIV, and they recommend shifting the emphasis of AIDS

research to basic research that could ultimately result in more

effective medicines.

Most people agree that AIDS is a very important issue and cannot be

ignored. Personally, I believe that the country and society is to blame

for the spread of AIDS. We let it get out of control. The modes of

transmission have been known for a considerable amount of time, yet the

disease still continues to spread. There are few people who can

honostly claim not to know the ways in which AIDS is transmitted.

Similarly, there are very few people who don’t know the ways to prevent

the spread of AIDS. These methods are very simple and easy to follow.

Yet, thousands will be infected this year alone.

Another aspect of AIDS that up until very recently was a serious

problem is the treatment, or mistreatment, of those who are HIV

positive, but do not have AIDS. One of the most famous stories is the

treatment of Ryan White. He was not allowed to attend a public school

because he had AIDS. His story was told and people began to realize

that those with HIV can lead “normal” lives and must be treated equally.

Fortunately, conditions have improved.

It is hard to know what society might be like had it not been for

AIDS. It might be fair to assume that society in general would be much

more sexually promiscuous had AIDS not curbed this trend. Another

effect that isn’t usually noticed at first glance is the creation of

jobs. AIDS has made it necessary for thousands of workers in the

pharmaceuticals industry as well as research. Also, people have been

hired to counsel AIDS patients and write literature about the causes and

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the methods of prevention. Even the arts have changed since AIDS came

about. Songs have been written. Movies have been made, such as ‘The

Band Played On’.

In conclusion, the effects of AIDS on society are very far-reaching.

They stretch from social behavior changes to a change in art and music.

AIDS has caused all Americans to think about their lives and how fragile

life is. They must be careful and use caution. Hopefully, all of

society will one day know the causes of AIDS and the means of

prevention. They will take knowledge and apply it. With a cure and an

end to the spread of this disease, society will survive and prosper.

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