

HEALTH IN MEN

Number 2: February 2002

NEWSLETTER

HIM's Second Year

The first year of the HIM study has been completed now and we're doing well. Over 450 men were interviewed between June and December last year. This was a great success. Now, it's time for us to start recruiting our second wave of volunteers for the study, plus following up those of you who have already been interviewed last year.

Of course, during the first few months of the study, we have been learning a lot about what we need to do to make this study work for everyone. As you can imagine, a study like this is very complex.

One of the first things we have had to reorganise has been the blood collection. Throughout last year we relied on the assistance of the nurses at St. Vincents Hospital but that has proved to be a lot of extra work for them. So we have employed a nurse to work just on HIM.

Another change we've had to make is to find more space. Many of you will have noticed that we have been hard-pressed for space to conduct HIM interviews, and we have had to use various offices throughout the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology & Clinical Research. This has been less than ideal, so we have had to obtain an additional couple of dedicated rooms just for interviewing space.

Of course, we have also been collecting your comments and evaluation forms.

Many of you have made some very helpful suggestions. Certainly, the space problem has been mentioned several times. Also, many of you have made suggestions about other things we should ask about or problems with particular

questions. Although we can't do everything, we do look at these and try to accommodate them as best we can.

This year we need to recruit another 500 gay men in Sydney as we will each year, so that by 2005 we should have about 2000 gay men enrolled in HIM. This will make it the largest study of its type in Australia.

We do, however, need your help to make this happen. If you know any other HIV-negative gay men, please encourage them to participate in the HIM study. They can either call our office on 9380-5858 or freecall 1800 445569. Or they can visit our website:

http://www.med.unsw.edu.au/nchecr/him_study.html

Finally, let me thank you once again for your continuing support of the HIM project. The National HIV Research Centres, ACON and the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations could not undertake this important work without your valuable assistance.



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What do they test my blood for anyway?

As you know, all men in the HIM study are tested for HIV. In addition, HIM participants are also asked to allow their blood to be tested for other sexually transmitted agents. So far, about 95% of you have consented to this. Currently, your blood is tested for hepatitis A, B and syphilis and these results are sent back to your doctor along with your HIV results.

Hepatitis A and B are both types of inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis A causes an illness that is often quite severe, requiring weeks off work, but the great majority of people will recover completely from this disease. It is spread through contact with faeces, but even microscopic amounts of faeces may spread hepatitis A, so most forms of gay sex, and even sharing cutlery with an infectious person can spread this disease. Hepatitis B is a more severe disease. Although most people recover from it, a minority suffer chronic liver damage. Liver failure and liver cancer, both of which are usually fatal, result in a very small proportion of people. Many people are infected with hepatitis B without knowing it, and clear the infection without any consequences. Hepatitis B is transmitted sexually and through blood to blood contact. Treatments for established hepatitis A and B are not very effective, but both hepatitis A and B can be prevented by a vaccine available from your doctor.

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection that can cause severe long-term illness, including damage to the brain and heart. There is evidence to suggest that syphilis is on the increase among gay men in some places. As long as it is treated early, syphilis is

easily cured with a course of injections or pills.

So, ask your doctor to tell you your results from these important tests, and you may wish to discuss vaccination. It is recommended that all gay men who have not been previously infected with hepatitis A and B be vaccinated.

Andrew Grulich

Where are my test results?

When we take your blood to test for HIV and these other infections, we have a responsibility to ensure that your regular doctor is informed of the results, in case you require treatment or some other clinical follow-up. That's why we ask for your doctor's details, and why we ask you to return to your doctor within a few weeks to collect your results.

Naturally, in a study this size, there are occasional problems such as the doctor's address not being recorded on a form and so the lab was unable to send the results. If your doctor has not received your results please contact our nurse, Harry, and he will make sure you receive a copy.

Also, to try and minimise any problems, Harry will be in touch with you a few weeks after your interview to make sure you have had no problems receiving your results. If you obtain your results beforehand you can also ring Harry (1800 445569) or send an email (HIM@nchecr.unsw.edu.au) to let him know.

Vaccine development

Many of you will be aware that the HIM study is a component of a comprehensive research program the goal of which is to design, manufacture and test candidate HIV vaccines. The Australian research team included in the original funding submission a proposal to conduct social and epidemiological research as part of the overall goal. We were very pleased that this approach was warmly received and thus allowed this important research to be included.

In parallel with the HIM study other members of the research team have been very busy over the last 18 months in laboratories around Australia. Our first candidate vaccines have been designed and tested in laboratory studies. Contractors in Australia and Germany have now manufactured the first batch of candidate materials, and the resultant materials are about to

been drafting and reviewing the documents that describe the first clinical trial and the complex testing that will occur in that experiment. These documents (protocols) have now been forwarded for external expert review at the US National Institutes of Health.

This review step represents the first component of oversight of the proposed research program. By the time the first volunteer is to be vaccinated the protocol will have been reviewed by at least 6 different expert bodies with broad terms of reference and responsibility. This is in addition to the detailed review resulting from discussion among the consortium members themselves.

This complex review process will take some time to complete and in addition to the other critical components of the development program we are not expecting to begin recruitment into the

undergo formal testing in animals as part of the prerequisite requirements for human studies. A large group of

CHANGE OF DETAILS FORM
Please complete this form if you have changed your details since your last interview.
You can send completed form to: Reply Post #72814 (no stamp required).
Otherwise, you can call us on 1800 445569 or email HIM@nchecr.unsw.edu.au

NAME:

ADDRESS:

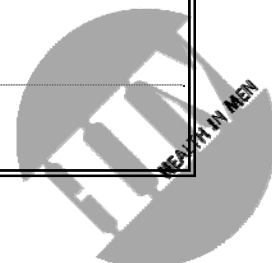
Contact Phone Numbers

Home:	Discretion (tick) YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Work:	Discretion (tick) YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Mobile:	Discretion (tick) YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>

EMAIL:

FAX:

DOCTOR:



HIV-Positive Friends?

Some HIM participants have said that their HIV-positive friends have been wondering how they can help with this project. Well, although HIM is for HIV-negative gay men, we have a complementary study called pH (Positive Health), which is for HIV-positive people (men and women, gay or straight).

Obviously the issues are very different for those who are HIV-positive and those who are HIV-negative. Consequently, the pH study is mainly concerned with experiences with treatments and choices around different kinds of treatments, as well as access to services. But it also includes questions around HIV vaccines and sexual behaviour, so that we will be able to see how issues around vaccines affect HIV-positive people as well as the information we collect about their impact on HIV-negative men in HIM.

If you have friends that would be willing to participate, please encourage them. They can either call our office on 9380-5858 or freecall 1800 445569. Or they can visit our website:

http://www.med.unsw.edu.au/nchechr/ph_study.html

How can you help?

Your participation has already helped: Research helps our community respond to issues raised by HIV and AIDS.

However, you can help us further. Firstly, this study depends on interviewing people each year so we can see what has changed and measure rates of HIV infection. Your willingness to come back again next year is crucial to the study's success. And this applies regardless of who you are or what your situation is. Indeed, even if absolutely nothing has changed for you next year when it is time to do your next interview, that is just as important as those people who have had a dramatic change in circumstances. We need both types of people if we are to accurately measure what is happening in our community and rates of HIV infection. Without this we cannot know how feasible it will be to conduct the HIV vaccine trial in Sydney.

Also, you can encourage your friends to participate in the study. Eventually, we will need about 2000 HIV-negative gay men in Sydney for the study, and this year we need to recruit about 500. Whether they are sexually active or not, whether they believe HIV remains an important issue for our community or they are 'over it', or whether or not they think a vaccine is important for gay men in Australia, their participation is important.

If you have friends that would be willing to participate, please encourage them. They can either call our office on 9380-5858 or freecall 1800 445569. Or they can visit our website:

http://www.med.unsw.edu.au/nchechr/him_study.html

Also, if you are in a gay organisation or helping organise a social function for gay men, we would be very happy to send someone along or provide

additional pamphlets to explain the study to those that might be able to assist.