

MAPPING PATHWAYS

Developing strategies for the use of antiretrovirals as HIV prevention

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Mapping Pathways is a multi-national project to develop and nurture a research-driven, community-led global understanding of the emerging evidence base around the adoption of antiretroviral-based prevention strategies to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The evidence base is more than results from clinical trials - it must include stakeholder and community perspectives as well.



27 June 2011

On the Ground with Brian Kanyemba: A snapshot of advocacy in Africa

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It's one thing to read about HIV advocacy and prevention and another to experience it first-hand, on the ground, day to day. That's how Brian Kanyemba experiences it. He is the research assistant at the [Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation](#), a Mapping Pathways partner organization. A core part of Brian's job involves traveling through South Africa's villages and cities, talking to people about issues surrounding men who have sex with men (MSM), and what the prevalence of HIV means within this group of people. Of late, his focus has been on putting forward the

"meaningfulness of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)" within the South African context, especially for the MSM community. This is no easy task.

Let's talk about sex

"South Africa is a really interesting and dynamic place," says Brian. "We might have gay rights and rights access of services across all sexual orientations, but when you start to talk about MSM, or about PrEP as an intervention among MSM, this is faced by a huge mental wall." This wall extends to talking about rectal microbicides as well, mostly due to the taboo against anal sex. Currently in development, rectal microbicides, or "topical PrEP", are ARV-based products that might reduce the risk of HIV infection when used topically in the rectum during anal intercourse. These are in phase II, with an expected phase III to be carried out in Africa and possibly Cape Town (to learn more about rectal microbicides and PrEP [click here](#) and [here](#)). "No one will come forward to talk about this openly," says Brian, "because in Africa, anal sex is associated with homosexuality, and homosexuality in Africa is not okay."

One way Brian goes around this taboo is by using a simple game about sexual pleasure called "Mapping the Body". While talking to people, he introduces the discussion on rectal microbicides by drawing three images on the board: a simple figure of a man, a woman, and another man. "I say, 'Guys let's put stars on areas where one can be sexually stimulated,'" says Brian. "You get amazing ideas from the group. And some people will say to put a star on the anal area, and then from there it is easier to link to PrEP and to introduce rectal microbicides." By conducting a matter-of-fact discussion focused on pleasure and the body, Brian finds the group is much better able to accept the idea of rectal microbicides as a form of protection.

"Heck no... I am not interested."

Despite his innovative methods, Brian has run into some pretty big walls where the topic of MSM and PrEP is concerned, especially within the healthcare sector and even the government. At a meeting with a parliament member who represents HIV issues, Brian recalls that when he

Mapping Pathways by Email

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The evidence base is more than P-values and confidence intervals

There is a clear and pressing need to engage policymakers and community stakeholders in the consideration of treatment and prevention options for HIV/AIDS.

This necessity has grown stronger in light of current research showing the extraordinary promise of using antiretroviral (ARV) therapies for the prevention of HIV. These ARV-based strategies include a 'treatment as prevention' model known as TLC+ (testing, linkage to care, plus treatment) as well as vaginal and rectal microbicides and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

Mapping Pathways includes a thorough review of the social, economic and clinical impacts of treatment as prevention and TLC+, as well as microbicides, PrEP, and post-exposure prophylaxis, in the contexts of South Africa, India and the United States. Participation and engagement is at the heart of the study, and stakeholder involvement across the community, research, policy and governmental spheres will be a focus in all three countries.

The project's aim is to provide the research and analysis that communities and policymakers need in order to formulate coherent, evidence-based decisions for HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention strategies in the 21st century.

Mapping Pathways firmly believes that the evidence base is comprised of more than scientific data derived from clinical research – it is more than P-values and confidence intervals. The perspectives of community members and key stakeholders must be valued as much as statistically significant trial results.

Community partners include [NAZ India](#)

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Anonymous [11 July, 2011 07:46](#)

Great experience Brian!!! Go man go!!!!

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Anonymous [15 July, 2011 05:12](#)

I think this is most challenging especially coming from country people believe to bear liberal minds. But i think you are doing a great job. We in Kenya are still facing challenges but you are motivating us. Keep up the good work.

[Reply](#)

blessed [15 July, 2011 06:18](#)

So touching I knw and understand wat u are talking abt as a zimbabwean gay man its not easy but I believe one day we are going to have a breakthrough so that pple can understand wat is it to be gay and not being homophobic cause it is killing the minority group keep on advocating on our behalf bro

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