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MEDIA ALERT

New Research Highlights Importance of Earlier Diagnosis of HIV

London, 24 February 2010 – Two studies presented at the 17th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) found that people recently diagnosed with HIV, and some of those with high CD4 counts when they begin treatment, are likely to live as long, or nearly as long, as those without HIV. The findings, reported on [aidsmap](http://aidsmap.com), highlight the importance of regular testing for HIV. If someone has HIV, early diagnosis means they can begin treatment sooner, making it more likely they'll live longer and enjoy better health.

The first study, from the Dutch ATHENA Cohort, measured the death rate of 4,612 patients in the Netherlands newly diagnosed between 1998 and 2007 over, on average, 3.3 years. The study excluded those who had to start antiretroviral therapy (ART) less than six months after diagnosis or who had an AIDS-defining illness in the first six months. It found that:

- Those diagnosed at the age of 25 have a life expectancy of 52.7 years (they would live until, on average, the age of 77.7) – just five months less than those without HIV.
- Men diagnosed at the age of 55 would live 1.3 years less and women 1.5 years less.

The second study involved a group of over 80,000 patients from 30 European countries. According to aidsmap, it found that *"men who were not injecting drug users and who had a current CD4 count over 500 were no more likely to die during the follow-up period than their HIV-negative equivalents"*.

Matthew Hodson, Head of Programmes at GMFA, the gay men's health charity, commented on the findings: "There is still no cure for HIV. The medical treatment for HIV is better now than it has ever been but all of the HIV positive men that I know would choose to be negative again if they were given the chance. Unfortunately it just doesn't work that way. HIV infection remains a serious, life-changing condition that should be avoided.

"There are some 32,000 gay men with HIV in the UK and over a quarter of them don't know they have the virus, which means that they are more likely to get ill. These findings are an important reminder that, if you do have HIV, the sooner you know the better.

"Going for an HIV test can be stressful. However, it's worth remembering that not going won't change your HIV status – it just means you won't know what it is. If you do have HIV, avoiding finding out is not an option. If you don't test, you will probably find out when you become ill. It will be more difficult to deal with learning you have HIV if you are ill already and your life expectancy will be reduced.

"Knowing your HIV status puts you in control. If you are HIV-negative, it will give you peace of mind. If you are HIV-positive, getting diagnosed early means you can start treatment before HIV seriously damages your immune system."

To read the full article on aidsmap, visit:

<http://www.aidsmap.com/en/news/507F3477-660B-4D89-8527-DD915A1B339D.asp>

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About GMFA

Founded in 1992, GMFA is the UK's leading charity dedicated to gay men's health. Its mission is to improve gay men's health by increasing the control they have over their own lives. The organisation is based on the belief that the best health promotion for gay men comes from gay men themselves. For this reason, it uses the knowledge and ideas of its 170 volunteers, most of them gay men, to design and plan its thought-provoking sexual health interventions. These include a range of advertising campaigns, leaflets, postcards and booklets; FS, its health magazine, distributed nationally in gay venues and GU clinics; and national and London-based courses covering sex education, life skills and smoking cessation. In addition, GMFA creates targeted sexual health interventions for black gay men and HIV positive gay men. Independent surveys have concluded that GMFA's campaigns reach up to 60% of the London gay population and that the organisation is the most reliable agency at reaching gay men. The charity runs a range of information websites:

- Sex & Sexual Health, www.gmfa.org.uk/sex - visited by a third of London's gay men in 2006;
- London Services, www.gmfa.org.uk/londonservices - detailed listing of sexual health services for gay men in London;
- Positive Gay Guide, www.gmfa.org.uk/positive - information for HIV positive gay men;
- The Guide, www.gmfa.org.uk/theguide - a guide to gay sports and social groups in London;
- Quit smoking, www.gmfa.org.uk/quitsmoking - information and advice on quitting smoking for gay men;
- About GMFA, www.gmfa.org.uk/aboutgmfa - for more information on GMFA.

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