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## **HIV/AIDS ISSUES IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

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# HIV/AIDS Issues in Social Work Practice

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# What is HIV/AIDS?

- HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system
- A compromised immune system is less able to fight off common germs and diseases
- AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) results from, and is the most severe manifestation of infection with HIV
- Most people infected with HIV will eventually develop AIDS (CDC, 2010)

# HIV Demographics

- In the US, over one million people live with HIV, and about 20 percent of these are unaware of their HIV infection
- Additionally, CDC estimates that approximately 50,000 persons in the US become infected with HIV each year (CDC, 2011)
- Each year, more than 18,000 Americans die of AIDS (CDC, 2010)

# Modes of HIV Transmissions

- Sexual intercourse with someone who has HIV
- Using intravenous needles that were also used by someone who has HIV
- Receiving contaminated blood transfusions or other products derived from contaminated blood (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman,2007).

# Modes of HIV Transmissions

- Babies may contract HIV before birth from their infected mothers (Prenatal)
- Babies may contract HIV during birth from their infected mothers (Perinatal)
- Babies may also contract HIV through breast milk (Postnatal) (Sigelman & Rider, 2006)
- Only the exchange of body fluids permits infection

# High Risk Factors

- Having multiple sex partners
- Practicing unsafe sex
- Sharing intravenous needles
- History of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

# Diagnostic Testing and Treatment

- Testing is the first step
- At this time there is no cure for AIDS
- Early diagnostic and treatment can however greatly improve both the quality and length of life
- People with HIV may seek medical care at hospital clinics, community health centers, drug treatment programs, private doctors' offices, and home care programs



# Strategies for Prevention

- Counseling, testing, and referral services
- Partner counseling and referral services
- Prevention for high risk populations
- Health education and risk reduction activities
- Perinatal transmission prevention
- Public information programs

# HIV and Social Justice

- Individuals with HIV/AIDS often suffer discrimination
- HIV/AIDS clients have the same basic rights and responsibilities accorded to all citizens
- Some healthcare providers are reluctant to care for HIV clients

# HIV and Social Justice

- Refusing to care for a HIV client could result in disciplinary action or dismissal
- People with HIV deal with discrimination issues of obtaining employment and insurance
- Other issues include public fear, isolation, victimization, ostracism, feelings of powerlessness

# Care of HIV/AIDS Clients

- Social workers have an ethical obligation to combat the numerous injustices connected to AIDS
- People with AIDS are covered by the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act
- The American with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination based on disability

# Social Work Roles

- Counseling people with HIV infection
- Conducting crisis intervention
- Providing case management
- Educating the general public and high-risk groups to reduce risk for HIV infection
- Advocating for the needs of HIV/AIDS patients

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