

# UNC Center for AIDS Research Newsletter

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



The mission of the UNC CFAR is to provide a multidisciplinary environment that promotes basic, clinical, behavioral and translational research in the prevention, detection and treatment of HIV infection.

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## Congratulations!

The UNC CFAR is proud to have a team of doctors, researchers, and staff who are fiercely committed to producing and translating information that advances the fight against HIV and AIDS. This month, we'd like to congratulate a few exceptional members of our team who received honors in 2013.



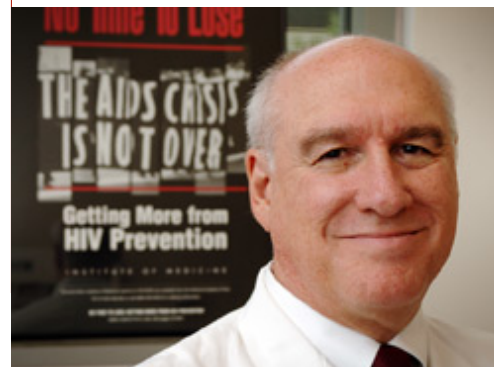
Dr. Joseph Eron has been awarded the 2013 HIV Clinical Educator Award for his skill at incorporating the science

behind complex HIV issues into a practical clinical context. This award recognizes doctors who have demonstrated significant achievement in the area of HIV clinical care and provider education. Dr. Eron is a professor of medicine at UNC and serves as the principal investigator for the AIDS Clinical Trial Unit and director of the Clinical Core at the UNC CFAR. His presence in prominent medical journals and national conferences, as well as his innovative online webinars and lectures, allow him to disseminate knowledge about HIV across the world.



Dr. J. Victor Garcia has been awarded the E.E. Just Award from the American Society for Cell Biology. The award recognizes outstanding scientific achievement by a minority scientist. Garcia is a professor of medicine and microbiology and immunology in the medical school and a member of the UNC Center for AIDS Research and the Institute for Global Health & Infectious Diseases. Garcia and his team have been working with a mouse that has a functioning human immune system to explore routes to a cure for HIV/AIDS. The "BLT mouse" (for bone marrow, liver and thymus) was pioneered by Garcia in 2006 and has been used to answer questions about HIV infection, transmission and prevention. As recipient of this award, Garcia delivered the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual E.E. Just Lecture at the American Society for Cell Biology Meeting in New Orleans in December.

Dr. Myron Cohen has received the 2013 North Carolina Award for Science. Cohen is a UNC physician and research leader at the UNC Center for AIDS Research who has done extraordinary international work on the transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Cohen is director of the Institute for Global Health & Infectious Diseases at UNC. Cohen served as the principal investigator of the HIV Prevention Trials Network 052 study. The results demonstrated that early treatment of HIV infection with antiretroviral therapy prevents sexual transmission of the HIV virus in sero-discordant couples by at least 96 percent. Cohen explained that the project "was a team effort". This work was recognized as the 2011 "Breakthrough of the Year" by Science Magazine. The North Carolina Award is the state's highest civilian honor. Governor Pat McCrory presented the award in November at the Sheraton Convention Center in Durham, N.C.

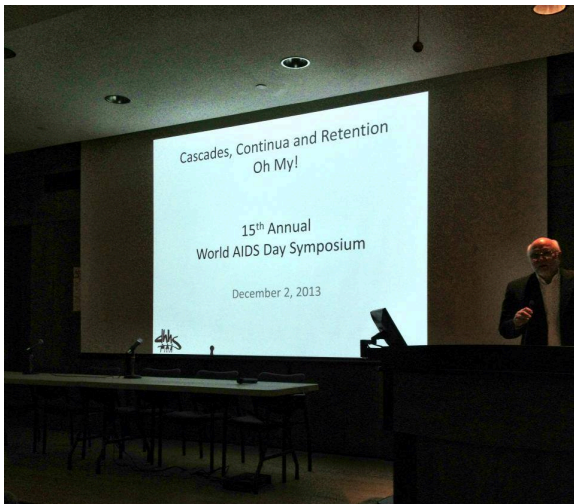


## 15<sup>th</sup> World AIDS Day Symposium at UNC-CH

Happy 2014! We've been busy cooking up some new projects and ideas here at the CFAR that we are so excited to share with you in the upcoming months!

In December, the UNC CFAR and the UNC Institute for Global Health and Diseases hosted the 15<sup>th</sup> annual World AIDS Day Symposium. The purpose of this annual event is to increase awareness and improve education about what's happening in the world of HIV/AIDS.

The symposium featured presentations by UNC faculty members and a patient panel. In the morning, a session was held that focused on clinical issues and the "North Carolina Cascade". Dr. Myron Cohen spoke on "HIV Treatment as Prevention" for future infections and Jacquelyn Clymore, Bill Miller, and Byrd Quinlivan explored various aspects of the NC Cascade. Dr. Heidi Swygard, Associate Professor of Medicine at UNC, explained that, "The NC Cascade is a way of looking at the epidemic in terms of and across the spectrum of diagnosis, engagement and retention in care with the ultimate goal of viral suppression."



Presenters shared research, explored new ideas, and raised important questions with symposium attendees throughout the day.

Photo Credit: UNC Institute for Global and Infectious Diseases

In the afternoon, sessions were dedicated to scientific research, specifically focused on "HIV and Cancer Malignancies" and "New People, New Directions in HIV Epidemiology". Dirk Dittmer spoke on "AIDS-associated cancers in the US", Stanley Lemon discussed the connection between Hepatitis C and HIV, and Jennifer Smith explored the links between screening for cervical cancer and the treatment of HIV seropositive women. Later in the afternoon, Kim Powers discussed the HIV epidemic in the era of Anti-Retroviral Therapy, Daniel Westreich raised new questions and ideas about women's reproductive health and HIV, and Brian Pence explored psychiatric disorders and health outcomes for persons living with HIV.

The patient panel was a powerful and moving part of the day. Facilitated by Dr. Joseph Eron, people living with HIV shared their experiences of life and courage with the group. "For some of the panelists this was their first time telling their story," said Madison Hayes, Director of the Community Outreach, Dissemination, and Education (CODE) Office at the CFAR. "Dr. Eron did a wonderful job guiding the panel to discuss their experiences regarding retention to care, and especially considering the diversity of the panel it was such a privilege to hear first-hand what we can do better to keep folks engaged in treatment. There wasn't a dry eye in the house."

The themes of the conference this year were designed to explore the new directions that the fields of HIV research and treatment are headed. Swygard commented, "The reality is our patients are living longer thanks to great treatment options. First, we know that treatment prevents transmission. We also know that our patients are at increased risk of developing malignancy as a result of living longer and living with a chronic (albeit controlled) infection". Most importantly, Swygard noted that "we need to understand that we are treating the WHOLE patient as well as acting in a Public Health prevention capacity." We are grateful for all who were able to attend and who helped to make this year's symposium such a success.

### **\*NEW\*: NC HIV Prevention Working Group**

The new NC HIV Prevention Working Group, led by Jacquelyn Clymore (NC HIV/STD director), Peter Leone (UNC) and Heidi Swygard (UNC), utilizes a multidisciplinary approach to describe and understand HIV transmission in NC. The group aims to work at the state level to better understand the "limitations of the data" that currently exists in order to develop and target state-specific prevention interventions. Swygard says, "We have a wonderful working relationship with the state and are exploring HIV epidemiology as well as syndemic STDs." Members include individuals from NCCU, RTI, and the community.

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