

The Russ Parr Show Transcript

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RUSS PARR, host:

On the phone line right now, I've got my friend Dr. Kevin Fenton. And, of course, he's with the CDC. That's the Centers for Disease Control.

Good morning, sir, how are you?

Dr. KEVIN FENTON (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention): Good morning. Very well. How are you?

PARR: It's always great to talk to you, because you always have great information for us. Today is National HIV Testing Day. And we always talk about how important it is. This is not something--just because you don't hear a whole bunch of cases now--it's not top of the line as far as news is concerned. But today, we still are facing some really drastic numbers as far as people getting tested and finding out what their status is. Is that correct?

Dr. FENTON: Yes, that's absolutely right. This--we're now about three decades into this epidemic. And would you believe that there are more than a million Americans who are HIV-infected? And nearly one in five of those people who are infected still don't know about their HIV status. So HIV testing is a really important time for us to mobilize our HIV testing and ensure that we're talking to our loved ones, speaking to our family members, and getting tested.

PARR: You know, it's--the bottom line is this: are all the symptoms different for everybody? Or can we like, you know, localize it to certain symptoms, so you know 'OK, something's wrong, maybe I need to go get tested?'

Dr. FENTON: You know, that's such a great question. And the problem is there are often no symptoms related to HIV, especially in the early phase of the disease. Some people may have what we call a seroconversion illness, which is like a flulike illness. Most times, this is missed. So there are a lot of people who are HIV-infected who don't know their status. And HIV testing is the only way to be absolutely sure that you're either HIV-negative or HIV-positive and, if you're positive, getting effective treatment and care.

PARR: Here's a staggering statistic. African-Americans make up only 12 percent of the population--everybody knows that--yet account for nearly half of all the new infections, 45 percent, and almost half of those living with HIV, 46 percent. That's close to 50 percent.

Dr. FENTON: That's absolutely right. And what is heartbreaking for me is that HIV is particularly severe in the African-American community. Do you know that one in sixteen black men will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime?

PARR: Wow.

Dr. FENTON: And one in thirty black women are going to be diagnosed with HIV. Now, this shouldn't be happening three decades into this epidemic.

PARR: No.

Dr. FENTON: We need to bring this epidemic to an end.

PARR: Well, the African-American community is way behind in prevention. I mean, there are other groups that have stepped up, you know, the information game and practicing what they preach. We just haven't got the message yet, have we?

Dr. FENTON: You know, that's right. And there's a combination of factors. It's the stigma. People don't want to talk about HIV. People think that there's too much--it's not the sort of thing that we should be talking about in polite company. But this is a disease which is killing us. And therefore, we need to be honest as a community, and we also need to engage young people in this fight, and we need to ensure that we're talking to all ages to promote HIV testing and awareness.

PARR: Yeah. Just another stat that will bother you. African-American youth are disproportionately affected by HIV infection, accounting for more than 55 percent of all HIV infections reported among persons aged 13-24.

Dr. FENTON: I know. See, we're losing--at risk of losing another generation of African-Americans. And, you know, we're, at the CDC, doing a lot of work, working with a range of partners to engage young people, engage African-American leaders in the battle against HIV. But more needs to be done. We need to expand these partnerships. And everybody has to take responsibility for this epidemic.

PARR: The Act Against AIDS campaign, tell everybody a little bit about that before we go.

Dr. FENTON: Great. So I'm very excited about this campaign. It was launched last year at the White House. And it really is a campaign which is focusing on raising awareness about HIV, promoting testing, and mobilizing communities around HIV testing. And we're actually partnering with a number of leading African-American organizations, including the NAACP, the National Council of Negro Women and a range of others to promote HIV testing and HIV prevention activities across the country and in communities nationwide.

PARR: It's wonderful. Listen, there are testing locations. If you want to find out a place to go, call 800-CDC-INFO. That's 800-CDC-INFO. You can go online to hivtest.org, or you can log onto www.actagainstaids.org. Get some information. It could save some people's lives, including your own.

Dr. Fenton, it's always great having you on the show. And you can always--my show is open for this kind of information; whenever you need to get information to me, I'm here for you.

Dr. FENTON: Great. Thank you so much.

PARR: All right. Take care now.

Dr. FENTON: Good morning.