

AIDS TREATMENT NEWS

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Subject: HIV/AIDS Denialism and the Gary Null Show:
Open Letter to WBAI and Pacifica Radio

WBAI and Pacifica should look closely Gary Null's show and understand the objections before putting it on the air. You can hear his recent "in-depth investigative report on HIV and AIDS" at <http://justiceandunity.org/Gary-Null/GaryNullShow060410Part1.mp3>.

Those in a hurry can listen to his 8-minute introduction, in which he claims to have helped many people cure their AIDS -- presumably with the help of his large selections of Gary Null nutritional supplements (<http://gnhealthyliving.com/scripts/prodList.asp?idCategory=19>), health DVDs (<http://gnhealthyliving.com/scripts/prodList.asp?idCategory=34> -- including *AIDS: A Second Opinion*, from Gary Null Productions (<http://gnhealthyliving.com/scripts/prodView.asp?idproduct=43>), and many other miscellaneous health products such as the Gary Null Ionic Air Purifier (<http://gnhealthyliving.com/scripts/prodView.asp?idproduct=236>).

If you have time, keep listening through minute 38 to hear the first interview on this show as well, with David Crowe, president of the Alberta Reappraising AIDS Society (www.aras.ab.ca/).

Or see November 23, 2010 blog entry, "Is 'HIV' Really the Cause of AIDS? Are there only 'a few' scientists who doubt this?" -- see the PS section below.

Gary Null's take-home message (often delivered as quotes from others) is that AIDS is not sexually transmitted and not caused by HIV -- and that the mainstream view of tens of thousands of doctors, scientists, and other workers in the U.S. and around the world is a lie, a grand fraud and cruel deception, existing to scare people and keep government money flowing. Persons who believe this can easily conclude that they do not need to worry about condoms or self-control -- and that if they are diagnosed with HIV they can reject their doctors' advice and cure themselves with nutrition and lifestyle changes instead. Yes, real people do follow such advice.

It is striking how little the main denialist views have changed over the years. In June 1994 I spent all day at a local San Francisco meeting of the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science), which had surreptitiously been captured by denialists (the word was not widely used at that time). The late Martin Delaney of Project Inform, one of the most influential AIDS activists ever, told the AAAS -- which could not cancel the meeting with its name on it at that late date, but insisted that real science also be included. I went and stayed to see if the denialists had anything that could help our readers save their lives, maybe nutritional or herbal ideas, but found nothing useful -- no surprise since their focus was not there, but instead on making issues, promoting their careers, and getting mass-media coverage. Most memorable was one speaker who claimed that the AIDS epidemic in Africa did not exist, that Africans were getting sick and dying of other things as they always had. Hearing Null in 2010, 16 years later, is *deja vu* -- although as African doctors said in the meantime, we are not idiots, this disease is something new.

In 1996 good HIV/AIDS treatments started becoming available in the U.S. And some other rich countries. U.S. Government death statistics were a year or two behind due to long neglect of public-health infrastructure. But in San Francisco we could see what was happening much faster through the decreasing obituaries in the *Bay Area Reporter* (www.ebar.com), the city's biggest circulation gay newspaper. Before the new protease inhibitors and triple-drug "cocktails," 25 or more deaths could be reported in the weekly listing, almost all gay men dying of AIDS. In one week there were 33 obituaries. As the new drugs came into use the number of obituaries went down to about four or five a week, with around half of those deaths having nothing to do with AIDS. Meanwhile, we started hearing that leading AIDS doctors were no longer having deaths in their practices.

Note: All the obituaries published in the *Bay Area Reporter* have been archived by the GLBT Historical Society; see www.glbthistory.org/obituaries. We checked the first half of 2010, and there are fewer than three obituaries per week. That's a long way from more than 20. To our knowledge there is no reason for the great drop in deaths, except that the new HIV/AIDS drugs were keeping people alive.

But many leading denialists in California died of AIDS, even after good treatments were available, because they refused to take them. They were sincere. Some were great people. They should not have died.

The U.S. was lucky, though, compared to South Africa -- where AIDS denialism was more successful than anywhere else in the world. The best estimate available of the death toll directly resulting (published by Harvard University researchers), is more than 300,000 people in South Africa -- see www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/26/aids-south-africa.

This tragedy happened as follows. South Africa needed stubborn leaders who could not be pushed around, in order to free itself from apartheid. Later, the country was repeatedly snubbed and mistreated by a clueless U.S./international AIDS mainstream. Denialists got to President Mbeki first; and once he decides, he is well known for not changing his mind.

Why does this denialist movement keep happening? My own sense is that it is largely driven by personal resentments resulting from legitimate grievances. We do live in a corrupt society, and AIDS is not immune. Corruption increases the grievances -- and the frustrated search for justice can most easily connect with scapegoats. (When a multi-trillion-dollar war is widely recognized as a total fraud yet that means nothing, except to add another lie saying it's being wound down -- and no one can address this corruption if they want a mainstream public career -- then the natural energies to repair the world need to find another vehicle for their expression, and AIDS conspiracy theory is one of many handy outlets.) Anti-authoritarianism is certainly appropriate today, but when lives are at stake, one must be right. Good-faith effort and belief by themselves are not enough.

Something else is at work, too -- illustrated by the then-outlandish, now new-normal original pricing for AZT, the first AIDS drug approved. AIDS stigma provides a wedge, letting corporations push in outrages and abuses they could not get away with otherwise. Once the precedent is set and the public doesn't much care (because it's AIDS, after all), the corporations can widen the hole and apply it generally. \$10,000 a year initial price for AZT has become tens of thousands of dollars or more a year for cancer and other life-critical treatments, typically manufactured for about 1% of what patients are forced to pay for them -- or go without. Your money or your life.

Similarly, AIDS denialism provided a wedge for climate denialism. Throw in the money, demonize noncontroversial working scientists, accuse them of bad faith and scare tactics to keep funding flowing, find key people for sale, make honesty a serious career impediment to journalists (not hard to do in corporate media), and then you can get what you want.

AIDS stigma provided the opening. The closest movement in cancer is a pale shadow of the denialist movement in AIDS. A few people think that doctors and scientists don't want to find cancer cures because there is so much money in treatment -- and there's some truth in that (we think not mainly the money, but rather the fact that human societies tend to deal with chronic problems by making little if any effort to solve them, and choosing instead to process them forever at great expense and suffering). But even though cancer affects far more people than AIDS, and as a participant in the same U.S. medical system is no less corrupt, still cancer denialism does not attract the money, the careerists, the hobbyists out to play with doing damage, and the organized, consistent, financed, almost-20-year campaign to recruit true believers in key media and other centers of influence.

Compared to AIDS, few people say that the whole war against cancer is a fraud to keep government funding flowing, and imply that people should stop their doctors' treatments and rely on vitamins and healthy living instead. How far would this get with cancer, on WBAI or other major media? The difference with AIDS is the stigma. There used to be stigma against cancer patients (that they have depressive personalities, and through bad thoughts are at fault for their illness). Only traces remain, but there is much, much more stigma against people with AIDS.

In the larger picture, the U.S. has become Truthiness Nation. More than ever before you can pick what you want to believe according to taste, like you pick out a new garment -- and find not just a cult but a ready-made community to support it. The Internet is the ultimate tool for helping bizarre factions coalesce and find followers.

AIDS denialism has changed remarkably little in the last 16 years at least, since the AAAS meeting noted above. On the Gary Null Show linked above, you can still hear 1984 papers argued at length in 2010, 26 years later. Yet as of November 2010, there are over 200,000 peer-reviewed publications found in a search for 'HIV' at www.pubmed.gov, including over 44,000 with free full text available online to anyone. How much is gained by fighting interminably over the first handful of HIV papers (of the total of 50 published in all of 1984)?

Freezing denialism into a cultural artifact appears to have helped it, by providing so many years to practice truthiness on the same, unchanging thing. Today the AIDS denialist case sounds smooth, well-supported, and plausible to the general public. Better than the "Swift Boat" campaign against Kerry, for example, where a good observer could see the professionals' tracks right away (though that didn't matter in the end).

It will be increasingly challenging to make democracy work when disinformation is so good.

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PS: As we went to press on November 23, www.garynull.com published 242 quoted excerpts, well spread out from over the last 23 years, under the title, "Is 'HIV' Really the Cause of AIDS? Are there only 'a few' scientists who doubt this?" (www.garynull.com/home/is-hiv-really-the-cause-of-aids-are-there-only-a-few-scienti.html). Many of these quotes are credible, or at least they were when they were current. Many others reflect denialist agendas.

Many of the 242 have nothing to do with whether HIV causes AIDS, the question asked in the title; instead, they are horror stories about side effects of AIDS treatments. Since the drugs are well known to have serious side effects and have been given to millions of people, and serious reactions that occur should be and often are published to warn others, the ability to compile such a list from over 20 years of HIV medicine is no surprise. Most of the prob-

lems cited have long been well known. Doctors and patients have always needed to balance the risks of treatment against the risks of no treatment. And since tens of millions of people have died from untreated HIV/AIDS, those risks and horror stories are real, too. Fortunately the treatments today are much better than the earlier ones, safer and more effective as well.

The quotes on the November 23 garynull.com blog entry are seemingly listed randomly across dates, subject areas, and medical credibility (from the *New England Journal of Medicine* to the former *Continuum Magazine*). What is consistent is the effort to justify Null's other statements on HIV and AIDS.

WBAI and Pacifica should remember that AIDS is forever in human history. You have a unique, wonderful history, and it's worth considering whether you want the AIDS denialism to become a major part of it.

About the author: I founded *AIDS Treatment News* in San Francisco in 1987, published it there through 2000, and moved it to Philadelphia in January 2001, where it is still published online at www.aidsnews.org. We have never accepted grants, contracts, or contributions from pharmaceutical or related companies, although they could subscribe to the print edition while we published it, from 1987 to October 2007. Our online publication is and has always been free to everyone.