

## ASSOCIATION OF NURSES IN AIDS CARE

### POSITION STATEMENT

#### The Impact of Political Extremism on HIV-Related Research

Adopted by ANAC Board of Directors, July 2004  
Reviewed and Revised by the ANAC Board: January 2008

#### Position:

*It is the position of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care that:*

- *It is a moral imperative that NIH continues to support scientists in the conduct of scientifically sound and unbiased research critical to the development and testing of interventions for people with HIV.*
- *The peer review and funding process of the NIH must continue without political or ideological interference.*
- *Nurses have an ethical obligation to educate and lobby the public, state, and federal elected officials as to the benefits of and need for unbiased and scientifically sound research to provide treatment for and prevent the spread of HIV.*

#### Statement of Concern:

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) funds vital research proposals across a broad, comprehensive spectrum of critical health issues, including HIV/AIDS. These proposals are approved and funded only after a long established intensive peer-review process is completed. In the recent past, some HIV/AIDS funded research projects focusing on stigmatized and/or marginalized people infected with HIV have come under the scrutiny of some conservative religious groups. These groups have brought their concerns about the topics and populations being studied to some of the elected Congressional officials. In turn, these Congressional representatives have questioned the validity of the research and have made some legislative effort to stop the funding of these projects claiming that it is a waste of tax-payer dollars. Such activities jeopardize the whole NIH peer-review process of research and could lead to further encroachment of legislating ideology as a basis for scientific research.

#### Background

This issue first reached public awareness when the Traditional Values Coalition (TVC), a conservative public policy organization claiming to represent some 43,000 conservative churches, developed a list of over 100 NIH research projects, defined by the TVC as "smarmy", aimed at prevention and care of people infected with HIV. As a result of this list, Representative Toomey, a Republican from Pennsylvania, submitted an Amendment (House Roll Call No. 352) to prohibit funding five (5) of the grants approved by NIH. The amendment was defeated by only 2 votes (210 ayes to 212 nays)(House Roll Call No. 52, 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session). Also targeted were studies addressing human sexuality, sexual behavior, HIV related stigma, condom use, and risk taking behaviors that are issues at the very core of the HIV epidemic. While not as dramatic, these types of issues continue to negatively influence availability of HIV program funding approved by the U.S. Congress.

The human race has long judged, banished and/or marginalized groups infected or affected with diseases that were thought to be brought on by a persons own actions or flaws in moral

character such as leprosy, tuberculosis and mental illness. This logic is the basis for claims by the congressmen and special interest groups that HIV related research is wasteful. Thus, this logic could be used to call into question research on other vital issues such as lung cancer, chronic obstructive lung disease, diabetes, heart disease, and obesity because, surely, these diseases are, at least in part, self inflicted.

As the result of rigorous scientific inquiry we eventually discovered the causes, treatments or cures for leprosy, tuberculosis and mental illness. As we discovered more information about these disorders the sense of moral indignation disappeared. Increased knowledge about these disorders changed the perception and harsh judgments imposed on people who had absolutely no control over becoming infected. The same will one day be true for HIV as long as research is allowed to continue.

### **References**

*The state of the science at the National Institutes of Health* [online].

[http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/example\\_nih.htm](http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/example_nih.htm)

*Interference with scientific research* [online].

[http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/method\\_research.htm](http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/method_research.htm)

*NIH peer review threatened: house barrel defeats attempt to stop NIH grants* [online].

<http://www.cossa.org/Toomey.htm>

Mason, D. (2004). The AAN vs the TVC; The American Academy of Nursing votes to oppose censorship in science. *American Journal of Nursing*, 104(3), 26.