Tracking HIV, Maintaining Confidentiality

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In an effort to track the spread of HIV, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released guidelines to assist states in collecting data on the disease. By using the names of patients who test positive for HIV or unique identifying codes, the CDC hopes to better track the virus.

The CDC suggests that testing sites report HIV cases with names or codes to state health departments, which would then pass the information on to the CDC. However, the names or codes would be removed before the cases are reported to the federal government. The government will then use this data to target the communities at greatest risk of HIV for research and prevention programs.

Further, the CDC guidelines include strict confidentiality procedures and protections, such as computer encryption, physical security, limited access, and penalties for abuse, plus quality standards for data to ensure completeness, timeliness, unduplicated reports and the ability to follow up with providers on cases of public health importance.

Thirty-four states already require testing sites to report the names of people with HIV. Washington, DC, and 11 other states currently use anonymous systems. Although CDC studies suggest that name-based HIV reporting has not served as a major deterrent to testing, the CDC continues to support anonymous testing so high-risk individuals are not discouraged from accessing HIV testing, treatment, and protection services. Further, the CDC states that maintaining anonymous testing sites will not seriously inhibit its ability to track the epidemic

Source: *Journal of AHIMA* 71:3 (March 2000)

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