The Problems with the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)

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Abstract

The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a $15 billion, five-year unified US government initiative, has goals of supporting treatment for two million HIV-infected people, preventing seven million new HIV infections, and supporting care for ten million people with and affected by HIV/AIDS, in fifteen focus countries.

Concerns about the program have surfaced:

- PEPFAR’s spending requirements interfere with teaching about condoms as part of the “ABC” (Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms) approach to prevention, and preclude working with high-risk populations of sex workers.
- PEPFAR grantees are required to sign an anti-prostitution and sex-trafficking agreement.
- The Global Gag Rule (Mexico Policy) compromises care.
- PEPFAR requires use of more expensive brand-name antiretroviral drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), creating confusion and extra work in settings where generics are available.

Solutions for these problems include the following:

- “Best practices” prevention education should be taught by all NGOs in the appropriate settings when allowed by the focus country’s government. Each ABC component has documented effectiveness in certain populations.
- While the anti-prostitution agreement is now moot for US NGOs, prostitution and sex trafficking must be opposed as a matter of human rights.
- The Global Gag Rule should be omitted from the PEPFAR document, to improve access to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment for vulnerable women.
Intellectual property (IP) protection is vital for economic growth. The WTO and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) must negotiate better solutions to IP rights relating to global public health issues.