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**Posted Feb. 21, 2008** - Some health-care personnel, when they must treat or care for a person with HIV, the AIDS virus, still react with distain, a recent article in the journal *AIDS Patient Care and STDs* reports.

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Examples include doctors who would not visit a patient's hospital room, neurologists who avoid looking patients in the eye, and ambulance personnel who madly threw bloodied gloves into the street after learning the injured patient carried the virus.

African Americans have twice the HIV infection rate of other ethnic Americans. These incidents that show the stigma still associated with HIV/HADS are noted in a study conducted by Lance S Rintamaki of the University at Buffalo and colleagues.

The study participants report several of these events, which include a wide variety of health-care personnel.

"Clinicians should have the training and common sense to avoid a lot of these behaviors, but perhaps we shouldn't be surprised when hearing about non-clinical staff caught up in these events," Rintamaki says. "They're likely relying on the same stereotypes and misinformation about HIV that are commonplace among the general public, which may lead them to act in fearful and stigmatizing ways toward HIV-positive patients," he added.

HIV patients spend a lot of time with health-care providers to treat and manage the disease. If patients are stigmatized, it can be discouraging. In studies, patients have noted that the most significant social and psychological challenge of having HIV is dealing with stigma, researchers say.

Some of the study participants said that the health-care providers blamed them for their condition. While some of the study participants said health workers treated them fairly, others said they experienced behaviors such as the avoidance of eye contact, asked uncomfortable questions and abusive language. Some even seem to blame them for their own conditions.

A phlebotomist (someone who draws blood), who was having trouble finding a vein form which to draw blood, admonished one patient: "If you hadn't done this to yourself, we wouldn't have to be going through this!"

Says Rintamaki: "This study reveals that patients are sensitive to such behaviors, indicating the need for all health-care personnel to be mindful of their actions toward these patients." The study was supported by a Veterans Administration Health Services Research and Development training grant.

**Do you know someone who has HIV/AIDS that has been treated with abuse and blame? Click "Discuss Now" to post your comment.**

