

Diane Havlir: Driving Science, Patient Care In HIV/AIDS

As chief of UCSF's HIV/AIDS Division and the Positive Health Program at San Francisco General Hospital (SFGH), Diane Havlir devotes her life to improving the treatment and care of people living with HIV in San Francisco and beyond.

Her passion and optimism are expressed in her tone and her ideas, such as her plan this year to chronicle the story of the epidemic with photographs in the hallways of the famous HIV/AIDS clinic at the General. This is one way to "remember and respect the victims of AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic, and to inspire us toward the ultimate goal – finding a cure," Havlir says.

The Positive Health Program is recognized worldwide for its excellence and innovation in HIV education, research and clinical care. There, direct patient care is provided by what Havlir describes as a "phenomenal and dedicated staff" that includes some of the most published and consulted HIV experts in the world.

For years, Havlir has been at the cutting edge of the advances that transformed HIV from a fatal infection to a chronic, manageable disease. She initially pioneered simple prophylactic regimens for complications of AIDS. She subsequently led some of the first clinical studies of antiretroviral agents that illustrated the limitations of monotherapy and HIV drug resistance.

The real breakthrough came in 1995 when several groups around the country, including Havlir's, began administering the first multidrug "cocktails" of antiretroviral medications. For the first time, lasting suppression of HIV was achieved, and patients experienced sustained improvements in their health. Havlir has continued investigations to define optimal and tolerable HIV treatment regimens.

Significant Progress

In addition to providing ongoing HIV clinical care to patients, the Positive Health Program faculty includes leading principal investigators of national and international clinical trials addressing the most pressing questions in HIV science, including drug resistance, acute infection, structured treatment interruptions, long-term nonprogression, new drug classes and immune enhancement.

Over the last two decades, researchers and clinicians have made significant progress toward managing HIV/AIDS, and Havlir has been a key contributor. She recently returned to UCSF to lead the Positive Health Program at SFGH.

As director of the division, Havlir leads many projects dedicated to advancing HIV treatment worldwide. She is an architect and author of the World Health Organization (WHO) HIV treatment guidelines and is working with colleagues to investigate the interactions between tuberculosis, malaria and HIV in sub-Saharan Africa and to define optimal treatment strategies.

"One of the reasons I came back to UCSF was because of the institution's strong commitment to global health," Havlir says.

Havlir cites the partnership between UCSF, SFGH and the Department of Public Health as a critical element of her program. "This collaboration supports and benefits our commitment to state-of-the-art patient care, high-caliber research, public service and teaching," Havlir says. "We are dedicated to the San Francisco community and are committed to making significant advances toward combating HIV internationally. There is no better place to accomplish this work than here."