

AIDS babies shouldn't get top medicine, doctors say

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Hundreds of doctors say they would recommend withholding expensive medical care from babies born to HIV-infected mothers even when they didn't know if the baby actually had the AIDS virus.

Most babies born to HIV-infected mothers do not develop the virus.

The findings, reported in yesterday's American Journal of Public Health, are "shocking," said Arthur Ammann of the Pediatric AIDS Foundation.

New York researchers studied 951 neonatologists nationwide to determine how they would treat newborns who had such expensive-to-treat conditions as kidney or heart disease in addition to being born to HIV-infected mothers.

Some 700 neonatologists said they would recommend withholding certain aggressive treatments, such as cardiac surgery or kidney dialysis, from babies who definitely have HIV. An additional 400 said knowing the mother was infected would alter their treatment decisions even if the baby's own HIV tests weren't complete.

The doctors were surveyed in 1991, and there is no way to know whether their opinions have changed, acknowledged the study's author, Betty Wolder Levin of the City University of New York.

But some AIDS activists said doctors may be more reluctant to offer expensive therapy to infected babies today because of growing pressure to cut health costs. Ninety percent of HIV-infected children get their health care from Medicaid.

"A lot of these children live well into their teens" with proper care, said Troy Petinbrink of the National Association of People With AIDS. "That study could turn out to be even more (worrisome) now."

Added Ammann: "It really tells us we've got to get the message out that there is treatment for HIV."

About 25 percent of mothers with the HIV virus infect their babies, and women can cut the risk by two-thirds by taking the drug AZT during pregnancy. Doctors often don't know for several weeks which infants are infected, because babies are born with their mothers' immune cells.

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Newt Gingrich: Reform findings too late for '96

By JIM ABRAMS
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C. — House Speaker Newt Gingrich pitched his plan yesterday for a commission on political reform, but said its findings would come too late to affect the 1996 election.

"Nothing is going to be done before the next election and everybody knows that," the Georgia Republican said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "Nothing will apply to the 1996 election."

Gingrich brushed aside criticisms, from both parties, that the GOP leadership has cooled on campaign and lobbying reform since Republicans gained control of Congress and began seeing big gains in contributions.

"The issue is much bigger than they think it is," Gingrich said. "We want to look at the totality of power in America, not just a very narrow definition of campaigns."

At the urging of Republican freshmen, the House will take up a bill Thursday on restricting free meals, trips and other gifts members can accept from lobbyists.

Gingrich showed little enthusiasm for limitations, saying that if Congress is going to go that route, an outright ban on gifts would be better. "I would have an automatic thing that says, 'don't bring T-shirts, don't bring caps.'"

On campaign reform, he promoted his idea, first proposed a week ago, of appointing a bipartisan commission, with eight members from each side, to "look at the totality of politics."

Under his proposal, the House and Senate would automatically have to take up any idea that is endorsed by three-fourths of the commission members, and review any idea that gets majority support.

He said the commission would report to Congress by May 1, and legislation could probably be presented on the House floor by next summer.

President Clinton and Gingrich agreed to set up such a commission during a joint appearance in New Hampshire last June, but the idea has made little headway since then.

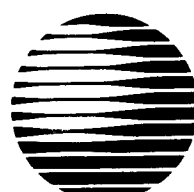
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