



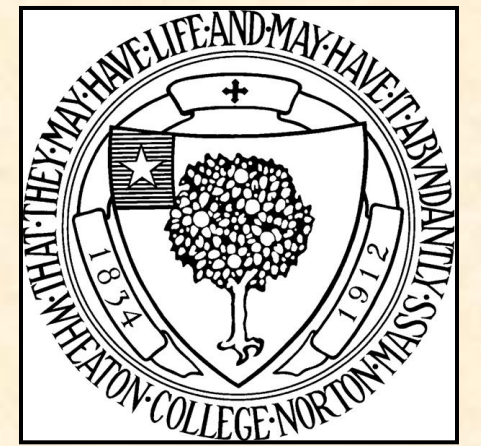
**BROWN**  
Alpert Medical School

# Are the 2006 CDC HIV testing recommendations ethically justified? It depends!

Merchant RC<sup>1</sup>, Waxman MJ<sup>1</sup>, Clark MA<sup>1</sup>, Celada MT<sup>2</sup>, and Sherwin AM<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Brown University, Providence, RI

<sup>2</sup>Wheaton College, Norton, MA



## OBJECTIVE

Leaders in HIV advocacy, care, and policy have voiced conflicting views regarding the ethics of the 2006 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) HIV testing recommendations.

Objectives: 1) Identify major elements of conflict raised in the medical and lay literature; 2) Conduct in-depth interviews with HIV leaders regarding the ethical concerns and justifications of the recommendations; and 3) Use qualitative analytic techniques to elucidate the prevailing ethical themes.

## METHODS

- Performed a MEDLINE and internet search for all published works in the medical and lay literature on the 2006 CDC HIV testing recommendations
- Compiled a list of US HIV leaders who authored or were quoted in these publications
- Assigned leaders to one of five groups: 1) supportive advocates, 2) concerned advocates, 3) supportive clinicians/researchers, 4) concerned clinicians/researchers, and 5) public officials
- Conducted semi-structured telephone interviews of five individuals in each group
- Attempted to balance the demographic characteristics of the respondents in each group
- Interviews were recorded and transcribed
- Major themes were summarized

## RESULTS

We identified seven major areas of conflicting ethical views:

1. Opt-out vs. opt-in HIV testing
2. General medical vs. specific written consent for HIV testing
3. Optional vs. mandatory prevention counseling
4. Universal screening as a routine practice
5. Making HIV testing similar to other kinds of routine medical tests
6. Performing HIV screening without assured linkage to care
7. Paying for HIV screening

Prevailing themes in the interviews were:

- Tension between competing priorities of public health vs. personal health needs
- Disagreement on whether HIV testing still requires unique processes and procedures
- Respondents' beliefs about how well informed patients are about HIV and HIV testing appear to influence their consideration of the new recommendations as ethically concerning or justified
- Ethical arguments were dependent upon whether the respondents viewed the procedures accompanying HIV testing as necessary or optional, as representing rights or privileges, or as serving as safeguards or barriers
- Respondents were not uniform in their interpretation of the CDC recommendations, which was reflected in their differing views on the ethical concerns and justifications about the recommendations

## CONCLUSIONS

Concerns regarding responsibilities to patients and violations of patients' rights were highly dependent upon the manner in which respondents believed the recommendations will be implemented. Disagreements on the ethics will likely impact how the recommendations will be implemented in the US.