

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Letter to the Editor:

St. Louisans with AIDS also face food crisis

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"Without food, AIDS cocktail hurts rather than helps" (Nov. 12) focuses on the AIDS crisis in Haiti. But there is a crisis in St. Louis. There still is no cure for AIDS, and HIV infection rates locally, nationally and internationally are increasing at an alarming pace.

The cost of treatment in later stages of HIV infections is nearly three times that in the early stages. Nutrition services are vital in keeping clients healthy to delay or prevent debilitating effects of the disease. Food helps some medications work and helps clients tolerate treatment. If clients don't adhere to their medications, the virus can mutate, requiring a different regimen — not an option for some people.

Food Outreach, the only organization in the area that focuses on providing nutritional support to people living with life-threatening illness, serves everyone who comes to its doors, even though federal funding has been cut by \$400,000 over the past three years. Many clients have no food in the house when they enroll in Food Outreach; they leave with enough food for two meals a day for two weeks. By the end of 2006, Food Outreach will have served more than 1,400 clients more than 275,000 meals.

Because some drugs cause secondary complications such as diabetes, liver disease, heart disease and high cholesterol, nutrition support is even more critical. Our food offering can be modified to satisfy these dietary restrictions.

Weight loss, especially muscle tissue wasting, often leads to malnutrition and is a fatal manifestation of AIDS. Malnutrition also is a factor in HIV progression. Nourishing food, medications and nutritional supplements all work together to fight the immune suppression initiated by HIV. By keeping our clients fed and healthy, Food Outreach not only is enhancing their quality of life, but it also is improving the overall health of the community.

**Greg Lukeman | St. Louis
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