Strategies in HIV prevention: the A-B-C approach

In your July 24 Editorial (p 363), you write that the A-B-C (Abstinence, Be faithful, and use Condoms) HIV prevention strategy is difficult to achieve in developing countries, many of them with the highest worldwide prevalence of HIV. However, there is a growing amount of evidence, suggesting that this approach for HIV prevention is effective even in developing countries. Indeed, at the same AIDS conference that Bush policies on AIDS were blamed for "failing focus on abstinence, the Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni remarked on the success of their programme, which involves encouraging individuals to delay sexual intercourse (abstinence), reduce casual sex, and increase their use of condoms."

The reduction in HIV prevalence in Uganda has been remarkable, and is clearly associated with changes in sexual behaviour. The achievements of Uganda's comprehensive programme have been compared with those that might have been obtained with an HIV vaccine with 80% effectiveness. Comparison of changes in lifestyles in Uganda with those of neighbouring countries indicates that sexual partner reduction, more than condom use, has been of paramount importance in curbing the HIV epidemic.

Simplistic criticism of A-B-C strategies, based on moral or ideological grounds rather than science, should be avoided. This approach has had impressive results in the only country where it has been implemented. So, why should it not be tested in other countries?

Make no mistake, there are cultural determinants (such as forced intergenerational sex) that make abstinence difficult, and the same determinants that make condom use difficult; women's empowerment is crucial.

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HIV/AIDS: the private sector is vital

Juan Pablo Gutierrez and colleagues (July 3, p 63) calculate the costs of achieving the WHO/UNAIDS "3 by 5" target at up to US$5.9 billion, and UNAIDS calls for US$10 billion a year by 2007. These estimates are for the additional costs for HIV/AIDS; they assume that public-sector infrastructure is capable of delivering those services. Sadly,