

Preventable HIV deaths lethal result of science denialism

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AIDS was a terrifying mystery, and then we solved it. When researchers identified the human immunodeficiency virus as the reason why young, previously healthy people were developing rare cancers and wasting away, it was a triumph of medical science.

But even as the medical community reached a consensus that HIV caused AIDS, a counter-movement was emerging, claiming that HIV didn't exist, or that the virus existed but was harmless. The symptoms of AIDS, according to some of these people, were actually caused by HIV therapies themselves. To this day, some people continue to believe that HIV is a hoax.

The story of the HIV denialist movement demonstrates that scientific agreement is not necessarily enough. Thousands of people died because the conspiracy theory was able to outrun the facts, thriving in the climate of fear and suspicion around a grisly disease that had struck a vulnerable population. To some groups who'd been fighting on behalf of AIDS patients, it was too tidy to see a multimillion-dollar drug market emerge, to treat the same people who'd already been stigmatized and marginalized.

In the United States, the HIV denial movement led individual patients to reject medication until it was too late. In South Africa, denialists managed to win influence with the country's president, Thabo Mbeki, and his public-health policies led to [an estimated 330,000 deaths that would otherwise have been preventable](#).

Read full, original post: [The Deadly Legacy of HIV Truthers](#)