Over 100 People Die of AIDS-Related Illness Each Year at This U.S. Clinic

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At an HIV/AIDS clinic in Atlanta, over 100 people die of causes related to the virus each year—and most of them are young, reports The Independent in a profile on the Ponce De Leon Center.

"The numbers alone are certainly astonishing," Jonathan Colasanti, MD, MSPH, an assistant professor of medicine in the Division of Infection Diseases at Emory University in Atlanta, told the newspaper. "The tragedy is not only do they tend to die very painful, drawn-out physical deaths, but the tougher thing for me to watch, is the emotional aspect. The number of people that we watch die alone, with no one in the room with them, surrounded by no family, is one of the greatest tragedies of our time."

The Ponce De Leon Center is part of the Grady Health System and is associated with Emory University School of Medicine. According to the center's website, the Ponce De Leon Center was founded in 1986 and provides services to about 5,000 people living with HIV. (Adults referred to the center must have a previous AIDS diagnosis and/or had a CD4 count that dipped below 200; pediatric and adolescent patients don't have to meet these criteria.)

To put the numbers in context, The Independent, which is based in the United Kingdom, offers these figures: London, which has a population of 10 million, saw 42 AIDS-related deaths in 2017 and 51 in 2016. Atlanta has a population of 500,000 and Ponce De Leon is just one clinic in that city.

As The Independent points out, gay Black men in the United States face a 50 percent chance of being diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime. In Atlanta, that number is closer to 60 percent.

To help explain this increased risk, the newspaper enumerates factors at play among the Black community.

"One cannot ignore in the South the legacy of racism and the remaining structural racism that affects our institutions," Wendy Armstrong, a professor of medicine at Emory, tells the paper. "That might be how far patients have to travel to get to a clinic, how welcome they feel in that clinic. It's that milieu that disadvantages our minority populations in accessing treatment."

The Independent profiled Ponce De Leon as part of the “AIDSfree” campaign, a U.K.-based holiday fundraising effort of Elton John AIDS Foundation and newspapers The Independent and Evening Standard. To learn more about the campaign, read “‘AIDSfree’ Fundraiser to Help Six Cities Worldwide, Including Atlanta.”

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