

## Health Studies faculty raise awareness about pre-exposure anti-HIV pill - TWU News



TWU health studies faculty Kristin Wiginton, left, and Kimberly A. Parker are using a nearly \$130,000 grant to raise knowledge and awareness about pre-exposure to the HIV virus. Photo credit: Ronda DuTeil11/30/15

DENTON – Two Texas Woman’s University faculty members have received a \$129,788 grant to raise women’s knowledge and awareness about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), the use of anti-HIV medication that keeps HIV-negative people from becoming infected. The single pill, taken daily, interferes with HIV’s ability to copy itself.

Kimberly A. Parker, Ph.D., and Kristin Wiginton, Ph.D., both associate professors in the TWU Department of Health Studies, will use the money to find ways to teach transgender and non-transgender women of color about PrEP. They also will target health providers who work with or serve those populations.

“Women, especially women of color, face an increased risk of contracting HIV, and many don’t know their risks,” Parker said. “We need to find ways to increase the resources available to them.”

The one-year, renewable grant provided through funding support from [Gilead Sciences, Inc.](#), one of the world’s largest biopharmaceutical companies, allows Parker and Wiginton to work with health leaders and community organizations to find creative ways to incorporate HIV-prevention education strategies into comprehensive health services and overall health discourse.

“The same way someone would go to the doctor to talk about diabetes or heart disease, we want them to talk about HIV.”

[Texas Black Women's Initiative](#) is TWU's grant collaborator. The organization's purpose is to reduce HIV/AIDS disparities in black women, and it's affiliated with [Texas Department of State Health Services](#).

The professors are creating Education Campaign to reach at least 800 minority women and health providers across Texas. While still in the early stages of development, Parker said they are working on the women's health curriculum for health-based agencies and groups that work with the target populations.

Abigail Tilton, Ph.D., associate dean of College of Arts and Sciences and an associate professor in the social work program, will assist in implementing the curriculum. She also will evaluate the education activities.

A pilot of the education component could be available as early as January and the toolbox, including a digital storytelling feature, could be available a few weeks later, Parker said. [Tarrant County Public Health Department](#) and [Phoenix House of Texas](#), a nonprofit drug and alcohol rehabilitation organization, will participate in the pilot and review its effectiveness.

De'An Roper, vice president of clinical judicial treatment programs of Phoenix House of Texas, said the web-based training will allow her staff to learn at times that work best for their schedules. It also will provide them more privacy to research sensitive issues, as opposed asking their questions in a classroom setting.

Meanwhile, Parker is crisscrossing the nation to gather women's stories. She traveled to Los Angeles, Pittsburgh and Chicago in one week.

"As we were doing the pilot interviews and receiving feedback about what the intervention should look like, especially the online component, some made the suggestion that in order to make it more applicable, we should use members of the target population," Parker said. "These are recorded vignettes, so I have been traveling to collect those."

## **Media Contact**

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