

Expedited partner therapy expored by state Senate panel

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SPRINGFIELD — People with sexually transmitted diseases often feel fine, so they're reluctant to seek medical attention even if their romantic partners are diagnosed with an STD, a couple of health experts told state lawmakers on Wednesday.

The experts, a central Illinois public health administrator and a Chicago doctor, urged members of an Illinois Senate panel to approve a plan that would implement a practice called "expedited partner therapy." With expedited partner therapy, a physician who is treating an individual for gonorrhea or chlamydia could also give the patient a single-dose antibiotic to pass along to his or her partner.

"You can't convince someone without symptoms to get treated," Julie Pryde, public health administrator for the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District, testified in front of the Senate Public Health Committee.

That kind of attitude contributes to the spread of STDs in Illinois and elsewhere, said Dr. William Wong of the Chicago Department of Public Health. Cook County ranks No. 1 among all U.S. counties in the number of gonorrhea cases, and it's No. 2 in the number of chlamydia cases, he said, citing recently released data.

The spread of STDs also is a problem in Peoria and other parts of Illinois, said Sen. David Koehler, D-Peoria, who is the main Senate sponsor of Senate Bill 212.

The bill passed the Senate committee on a vote of 8-1, and it heads to the full Senate. To become law, it must pass there and in the House of Representatives and get signed by the governor.

Koehler proposed the same legislation last year, but it stalled in committee when some senators said they were uncomfortable with the idea of prescribing antibiotics for people who haven't undergone a medical exam.

On Wednesday, only Sen. Dave Syverson, R-Rockford, opposed the bill. He said it would basically let an unqualified person provide medical treatment to someone else.

But John Peller, director of government relations for the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, said expedited partner therapy is becoming the standard of care for sexually transmitted diseases all across the country.

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