Harnessing Medical Pluralism in South Africa: Culture-Centered HIV Interventions

Presented by:

Claudia E. Ordóñez
Anthropologist, M.A.I.R and Adjunct Instructor

Hubert Department of Global Health
Rollins School of Public Health
Emory University

Wednesday, April 24, 2019 @ 12:00 noon
Claudia Nance Rollins Building
1518 Clifton Road, Room 1000

Claudia E. Ordóñez is an anthropologist and interculturalist. Her work uses a trans-disciplinary approach and seeks to improve human interaction in the context of healthcare, with the ultimate goal to improve human health. Her academic training is in anthropology, archaeology, international development and intercultural relations. She also has a certificate in Health and Human Rights. Over the last 9 years, her research is in collaborations between the biomedical and social sciences, investigating the cultural aspects of the HIV epidemic in South Africa, southern Africa and the Southeast region of the US. Her academic work uses the medical and applied anthropology perspectives dealing with traditional African medicine, gender and power relations in the context of HIV risk factors, intercultural awareness and sensitivity and trans-disciplinary collaborations.

Twenty years after global acknowledgment of the HIV epidemic in South Africa (SA), the introduction of government-provided Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) for the South African HIV-positive population has resulted in a significant change in the dynamics of the epidemic, demonstrated by accomplishments such as lowering the rate of mother-to-child transmission and increasing the national life expectancy. Incidences continue to be high, and there is a significant percentage of the HIV-positive population that ART has not reached.

The biomedical model of care has struggled to sustainably manage ART programs in SA, a post-colonial country with a pluralistic health system. Drawing on a decade of collaborative anthropological/biomedical research on the socio-cultural aspects of HIV treatment in SA, this presentation addresses the broader trends and challenges of implementing ART in the country and uses ethnographic experience in the province of KwaZulu-Natal to examine policies and trends related to ART in SA vis-à-vis the experience of HIV-positive South Africans.