

[Download PDF](#)[nature](#) > [nature medicine](#) > [news](#) > article[Download PDF](#)

News | Published: December 2007

BBC apologizes for airing AIDS 'denialist' documentary

[Virginia Hughes](#)[Nature Medicine](#) **13**, 1391 (2007)**7840** Accesses | **1** Citations | **40** Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

Foster children took part in trials of AIDS drugs. Credit: Klaas Lingbeek- van Kranen

[Download PDF](#)

response to complaints by several prominent AIDS scientists that the video, *Guinea Pig Kids*, primarily aired the views of AIDS denialists, who don't believe that the HIV virus causes AIDS.

“The BBC has produced thousands of hours of current affairs programming since 2004. This was a blip, which is why it's been taken so seriously,” says BBC spokesman Mark Ogle. The BBC has formed a committee to investigate “why these editorial lapses occurred,” Ogle says, and the committee's findings will eventually be “prominently displayed” on the documentary's BBC website.

First aired in November 2004, the film denounced Incarnation Children's Center (ICC), a private nursing facility near Harlem that treats HIV-positive foster children, most of whom are African-American or Hispanic. From the early 1990s until 2002, 62 children living at the center took part in trials of AIDS drugs run by Columbia University Medical Center.

In 1991, after the first protease inhibitor AIDS drugs had been successfully tested on adults, pediatric clinical trials began in more than 30 US medical centers. “Children metabolize drugs differently,” says pediatrician Arthur Ammann, who lobbied the US National Institutes of Health to sponsor the first clinical trials to test AIDS drugs in children. “Without those trials, there would have been literally hundreds of thousands of children given drugs in the wrong dose.”

Guinea Pig Kids claimed that the ICC force-fed the orphans “lethal” experimental AIDS

[Download PDF](#)

denied guardianship by the New York state government because she refused to give the children prescribed HIV drugs. The video falsely implied that her rights had been stripped away because she refused to allow the children to enroll in the clinical trial.

“My only interest was investigating the very legitimate story of how vulnerable black and Hispanic foster children as young as three months old were being volunteered by the New York City authorities for drug trials,” the filmmaker, Jamie Doran, wrote in an email to *Nature Medicine*. Doran says he “went to immense lengths” to interview the ICC caretakers and the doctors who administered the trials.

But AIDS researchers say the filmmakers only interviewed well-known AIDS denialists whose comments, according to the BBC's apology, “would fly in the face of mainstream medical opinion.” The video did not mention the drugs' potential to save lives.

The ICC complained about the documentary to the director general of the BBC in March 2005, but the BBC “simply dismissed us,” says ICC public relations counsel Gerald McKelvey.

Over the following 18 months, Nathan Geffen of the South Africa-based activist group Treatment Action Campaign and six other AIDS scientists and activists—many of whom are affiliated with the nonprofit AIDSTruth—filed complaints with the BBC. “It was important to us because so many people think the BBC is absolutely scrupulous and authoritative,” says Jeanne Bergman, director of planning and policy research at

[Download PDF](#)

After two rejections from the BBC, Weill Cornell Medical College immunologist John Moore sent the letter to science journalists he knew at the BBC. “They were just horrified,” Moore says, and they passed the letter on to staff of the deputy director general. “Then the investigation was finally taken seriously,” Moore says.

Moore and Bergman consider the apology a substantial victory, but others worry about the film's lasting impact. “The problem is that false information, backed by the BBC, got out there,” Ammann says. “The apology won't.”

Update:

The BBC Editorial Complaints Unit's ruling on *Guinea Pig Kids* has now been published:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints/news/2007/11/30/51154.shtml>

Author information

Authors and Affiliations

New York

Virginia Hughes

[Download PDF](#)

About this article

Cite this article

Hughes, V. BBC apologizes for airing AIDS 'denialist' documentary. *Nat Med* **13**, 1391 (2007).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/nm1207-1391>

Issue Date

December 2007

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1038/nm1207-1391>

Share this article

Anyone you share the following link with will be able to read this content:

[Get shareable link](#)

Provided by the Springer Nature SharedIt content-sharing initiative

Nature Medicine (*Nat Med*) | ISSN 1546-170X (online) | ISSN 1078-8956 (print)