

MSM HIV Preventive Campaign 2007

Background

In response to the rising HIV epidemic in MSM, Red Ribbon Centre (RRC) launched the “Do It Safely” HIV Preventive Campaign in 2006 from August 2006 to April 2007. The campaign aimed at improving the practice of safer sex, increasing condom availability and encouraging HIV testing among MSM. After independent evaluation by a research institute, the campaign was found to be effective in raising HIV awareness among MSM by adopting a social marketing approach. Having taken stock of the lessons learnt from the first campaign and the service gaps in the field at the time, RRC launched a second HIV preventive campaign in MSM in August 2007.

Scoping

From the HIV voluntary reporting system statistics, there was a significant increase in the proportion of HIV infections among MSM. The most vulnerable age group mainly lied between aged 21-40 years old MSM. Therefore, the preventive campaign should target this group of people.

Besides that, further study from those clusters of HIV-1 Subtype B infections with similar gene sequencing showed there most all of them have history of homosexual or bisexual contacts. These clusters had growth in size continuously which indicated a rapid local HIV transmission has been occurred in the MSM population in Hong Kong which may contribute to the growth of epidemic.

Use of psychotropic substance during sexual activity, unprotected sex with other men and use of internet to source partner were identified as possible risk factors for contracting HIV in a Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) study. Furthermore, evaluation on the “Do it Safely” Campaign showed that:

- About half of the MSM respondents in the survey knew the MSM HIV antibody testing hotline (21171069) that was launched in 2006.
- About half of the MSM respondents visiting gay venue (56.2% in Bar and 42.8% in sauna) received free condoms and lubricants
- Internet advertisement, free condom and lubricant, poster and advertisement in bar were the top 4 attractive means to spread HIV prevention message.

- Only 5.2% perceived they had a large or very large chance of contracting HIV.

Development of campaign

RRC organized the MSM HIV Preventive Campaign 2007 to reduce their risk of HIV infection among MSM. The five objectives of the campaign were as follows:

1. To raise awareness of MSM on impending threat of HIV infection and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs);
2. To inform MSM of the urgent need to adopt prevention measures by avoiding unprotected sex, reducing the number of sexual partners and practising safer sex;
3. To inform MSM of the danger of abuse of soft drugs or psychotropic substances before sex;
4. To decrease the barrier created by discrimination and stigma on AIDS and gay status in HIV prevention; and
5. To empower MSM in HIV prevention and appeal to and engage the MSM community in participation in HIV prevention.

RRC invited advertising agencies to bid for the implementation of the campaign. Hong Kong Ondo Creation Limited was appointed and developed a three-phase campaign, which was named “Zero Heroes”. There were 3 phases of the campaign which included “zero infection”, “zero drug abuse” and “zero hopelessness”.

The first phase of campaign was “Zero Infection” which had a core message: that HIV infection is spreading rapidly among MSM in Hong Kong. Sub-messages included “Unless members use condoms every time they have sex, one in four MSM will have HIV infection in 10 year’s time. We should face it.”, “STDs and HIV infection are at the door, don’t take any unnecessary risk! No condom, no sex!” and “HIV status cannot be differentiated by external appearance or social class. To stay negative, use condom every time even with your regular partner (including oral sex).” Core message for the poster for general public: HIV is spreading rapidly in Hong Kong; use a condom for safer sex.

The second phase of campaign was “Zero Drug Abuse” and the core message: “Soft drugs will impair you judgment and will lead to unsafe sex, never use drugs

before sex!” Sub-messages included “After taking drugs before sex, you will be exposed to HIV and STDs without knowing it.” and “Information of harm of common soft drugs. Drug is no fun! Be wise and say “No” to drugs.” A set of gay-friendly information, education and communication (IEC) materials on soft drugs was produced for distribution in gay venues.

The third phase of campaign was “Zero Hopelessness” which brought a core message that “Even you have unsafe sex before; you can do something for yourself and your partner by having an HIV test.” Sub-messages had included “By having an early HIV test, you can receive care early and enjoy a healthier life. HIV test is your hope.” and “Life is precious! Care and love others. Be a smart member, always protecting others by practicing safer sex.”

Core message for the poster for general public: If you worry about getting HIV infection, have an HIV test which is an entry point for access to HIV prevention and care.

Implementation of campaign

A mapping exercise was performed to include all potential AIDS-related stakeholder and partners including bars, saunas, non-governmental organizations and the MSM community. The Working Group on HIV Prevention in MSM, which was housed at RRC contributed to play a vital role on advising RRC how to take the campaign forward and fine-tuning the preventive messages in the campaign.

The design of the “Zerohero” which was a muscular comic figure may be appealing to part of the gay community, in particular those persons who grew up in the age of reading comic books. The adoption of “Zerohero” as the main theme was in line with the concept of empowerment of the community that everyone could play his part as a hero in combating the HIV epidemic. To convey the messages to gay community, the campaign had employed a broad spectrum of media, which included internet banners, advertisements and editorials in the most popular gay magazines, and gay venue-based promotion. Health educational items including posters, tissue packs with information cards and coasters were distributed in popular gay venues and through different NGO working in the field of HIV prevention. Innovative promotional method was employed such as the use of men’s underwear as a health

educational item to facilitate the promotion of safer sex messages in gay saunas. An informational booklet on the use of psychotropic substances was produced to disseminate the harmful effects of these drugs.

Apart from launching the campaign in over 70 gay venues, further coverage of this campaign was achieved by displaying these promotion materials in popular gay events such as the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival 2007. A full page education material on the harmful effect of drug abuse was posted on the festival program guide. A thirty-second video clip titled “Zero drug abuse” was broadcast before each film screening.

The campaign will be evaluated to facilitate the planning of the next HIV preventive campaign. The longer term behaviour change of the MSM community in terms of adoption of safer sex and increased uptake of HIV testing and the changing trends of HIV seroprevalence could be evaluated by regular large-scaled surveys such as PRISM.