

Setting up of a Pearl River Delta Region HIV Epidemiological Research and Surveillance Project

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Issues

The exchange of infectious diseases (ID) surveillance information between Hong Kong and Mainland China needs to be improved. The surveillance systems maintained by Hong Kong and cities in nearby Pearl River Delta Region (PRDR) differ significantly in design and the format of information release.

Descriptions

Since 1994, an informal forum has been set up through the collaborative efforts of public health professionals from PRDR cities including Macau, Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. The forum led to the conduction of three scientific meetings and publication of the corresponding proceedings on HIV Surveillance and Epidemiology in the Region in 1998, 2000 and 2002. A core group of experts was set up from these cities to meet regularly to discuss issues in HIV/AIDS in the PRDR. An electronic platform consisting of a HIV data entry sheet or template was designed to allow systematic collection of HIV surveillance data from cities in PRDR to present HIV prevalence and risk levels in different community groups. An HIV surveillance electronic platform is being considered to customize the data collection mechanisms.

Lessons Learned

The collection of surveillance data across cities has helped to evaluate the HIV situation over time and to estimate the size of the epidemic in PRDR. The SARS outbreak in 2003 has further enabled the information exchange mechanisms to be formalized after the establishment of the Guangdong - Hong Kong - Macao tripartite ID Expert Group, with the endorsement of the Governments of the three places. The following elements are important in ensuring the success of such a cross-border public health project: involvement of professionals, policy support and utilization of opportunities for enhancing communications.

Recommendations

The establishment of a technical forum is a useful step for transforming a vision of professional collaboration into achievable HIV prevention strategy in the region that cuts through political boundaries.