

## **Collaboration between HIV Clinic and Methadone Clinic for the Diagnosis and Care of HIV-Infected Drug Users**

SK CHENG, CK LEE, CF HO, KH WONG, YW MAK, YT LEE, LM HO

Special Preventive Programme, Centre for Health Protection, Department of Health,  
Narcotics & Drug Administration, Department of Health, Hong Kong.  
Society for the aid and rehabilitation of drug abusers, Hong Kong

### **Issues :**

Unsafe injecting practices pose high risk for HIV infection. Hong Kong has an extensive network of 20 methadone clinics (MC) which serve as contact points to reach drug users for HIV prevention and intervention.

### **Description :**

A universal HIV antibody (urine) testing programme in MCs (MUT) was implemented in 2004. Promoting early diagnosis and referral for care of HIV-infected drug users is one key objective of this programme. The drug workers and HIV workers plan the programme together and develop a protocol manual. There are several on-going activities to support patient care. A prompt referral mechanism to HIV counselling and treatment service is agreed between MC and HIV clinic. MC social workers sometimes accompany patients to the first visit to ITC. Regular meetings at programme level are held between ITC doctors/nurses and MC doctors/social workers. Close communication between the case workers at either side is maintained to optimize individual patient management. Psychosocial support, drug use problem, regularity and dosage of methadone treatment, HIV disease monitoring, need for antiretroviral therapy and HIV prevention were closely followed for each patient. Induction and refresher training workshops on HIV/AIDS and the programme for MC staff was organized.

### **Lessons Learned :**

It was able to diagnose and promptly refer more HIV-infected drug users through the new MUT programme. As a result, they are accessible for joint efforts on monitoring, care and preventive interventions.

### **Recommendations :**

Tackling both HIV infection and drug use in an integrative manner is desirable. Collaboration between drug workers and HIV workers of government and non-governmental organizations in a team approach with close communication and information sharing is central to success. Maintaining HIV infected drug users in treatment networks serve both clinical and public health good.

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