

A Syphilis Awareness Campaign to Address Prevention Needs on HIV and STIs for MSM

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Issues:

Recent data from Europe and the United States had shown an increase in syphilis cases among men who have sex with men (MSM). In Hong Kong, increase in syphilis reports and increasing rates of HIV-coinfection were noted among MSM clients in the government HIV clinic and Social Hygiene Clinics in recent years.

Description:

The Syphilis Awareness Campaign (Campaign) was developed by the Special Preventive Programme of the Department of Health in the context of enhancing HIV prevention and promoting sexual health among MSM. It aimed to increase syphilis awareness, promote safer sex and syphilis testing, and adopted a social marketing approach. Information concerning MSM was collected for the development and planning of publicity materials and activities. Input from the MSM community and other stakeholders was sought to increase the marketing appeal of such materials and activities, which had a movie-based theme, to the MSM community. Marketing strategy involved multiple media channels as well as venues, and collaboration with other stakeholders. Apart from using conventional MSM venues as in previous campaigns, some non-MSM but gay friendly venues were also included.

Lessons learned:

HIV prevention and promotion of sexual health among MSM require a targeted approach to meet the needs of MSM. A social marketing approach was adopted to help ensure that the right “products” were “sold” to MSM through appropriate channels. Evaluation indicators such as recall of message, and acceptance and views on the appropriateness of the Campaign had helped gauge the success of this approach. The success of the Campaign also depended much on the support and cooperation of other stakeholders such as gay venue owners and NGOs.

Next steps:

Findings from the evaluation of the Campaign provided important information which would better inform future efforts in HIV prevention and promoting sexual health among MSM, an important at-risk group in the HIV epidemic.