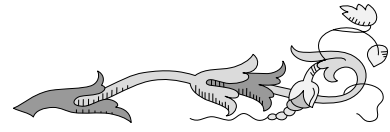


The Node *... where a leaf arises from a stem*



The Node is a bilingual publication dedicated to global HIV/AIDS issues by Red Ribbon Centre, the UNAIDS Collaborating Centre for Technical Support

New Joint UN Report Shows Epidemic NOT Inevitable

In a joint report issued in December 2000 - "Health, a key to Prosperity : Success Stories in Developing Countries" - the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank outline key factors for combating AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, childhood diseases and maternal and perinatal conditions, even in resource-poor settings.

The Report is broken down into five sections: tuberculosis, malaria, AIDS, childhood disease, and maternal and perinatal conditions. The following are the highlights on AIDS:

While newly-released figures show that AIDS killed an estimated 3 million people in 2000, the United Nations argues against accepting a worsening AIDS pandemic as inevitable. Although there is no AIDS vaccine and antiretroviral therapy is still unaffordable for most developing countries, experience in countries such as Senegal, Thailand and Uganda has shown that reduction in infection rates is possible.

A comprehensive package of prevention and care strategies - based on firm political commitment, can have a major impact on the burden and spread of HIV/AIDS.

Effective Measures Include :

- Accessible, inexpensive condoms
- Immediate treatment of other sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Voluntary counselling and testing (VCT)
- Prevention of mother-to-child transmission
- Promotion of harm reduction to reduce HIV infection in drug users
- Sexual health education in school and beyond
- Accelerating access to care, support, and treatment, including psychosocial support, home and community-based care, and innovative new partnerships to provide sustainable and affordable supplies of medicines and diagnostics.

"Twenty years of experience of the epidemic have demonstrated some key components of an effective response: strong leadership, partnerships, overcoming stigma, addressing social vulnerability, linking prevention to care, focusing on young people, and encouraging community involvement in the response," explained Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS.

Readers might write to the World Health Organization or UNAIDS requesting for the report. (WHO Communicable Diseases <http://www.who.int>) The report is also available at the resource centre of the Red Ribbon Centre for browsing.

2 Cities



In late December 2000, a delegation composing of 18 officials from Guangzhou City visited Hong Kong to draw reference from the latter's experience in HIV prevention and management. The delegates, headed by a vice-mayor, had come from a variety of government sectors including health, finance, publicity, public security, planning and justice. This was the first time that the two cities came together for an intensive three-day sharing of information, experience and ideas. The delegates visited Red Ribbon Centre, clinical facilities, counselling and testing services, and met with members of the Advisory Council on AIDS and other community leaders.



There are similarities and differences in the HIV situations in the two cities. The first case of HIV was diagnosed in the nineteen eighties - 1984 in Hong Kong and 1986 in Guangzhou. The reported numbers have remained low over the years. Sexual transmission is now the

commonest mode of HIV infection in Hong Kong, compared to injecting drug use in Guangzhou. In some drug-taking communities, the HIV rate had exceeded 10% in Guangzhou. These phenomena had prompted the Guangzhou delegates and their Hong Kong counterparts to focus on three issues of common interest -how to prevent HIV spread in drug users, management of HIV infected people, and the process of policy development.

The delegates visited Hong Kong's methadone clinics, drug rehabilitation services and the newly opened resource centre. The methadone clinics, set up in 1972, are serving some 7000 drug users on a daily basis. The injection and needle-sharing rates of drug users on methadone are extremely low. Methadone maintenance is not available in Guangzhou (in Mainland China in general). There were concerns that the use of methadone would undermine the efforts of drug eradication and the strategy of abstinence. It was acknowledged that there's no single approach that could solve the problem arising from addiction. Recognized as an illness, different modalities of treatment shall be available to meet the needs of the society and different individuals.

The use of Highly Active Antiretroviral Treatment (HAART) is changing the clinical landscape of HIV/AIDS in developed countries. While this is available in the public service in Hong

Kong, its access is limited in Guangzhou. The delegates' visit to the clinical and counselling facilities, however, highlighted a wide range of subjects of common interest. The protection of confidentiality of HIV/AIDS patients was an area of concern. The separation of epidemiological information from clinical information was introduced by the professionals in Hong Kong. The Guangzhou delegates listened to another Hong Kong story - when a day treatment centre was established to integrate HIV service with STD and dermatology treatments, there were strong protests by residents living in the vicinity of the building. Discrimination arising as a result of ignorance was a lesson Hong Kong learned in a painful way. The subsequent formation of a community liaison group with active participation of the community has helped to resolve the problem.

Understandably all effective HIV prevention and care activities required good policy support. During the three-day visit, the Guangzhou delegates met with the chairman and members of the Hong Kong Advisory Council on AIDS, a non-statutory body appointed by the Government to advise on AIDS policy. The delegates noted that different from Guangzhou, there was no specific legislation on the subject of AIDS in Hong Kong, a phenomenon which had both merits and shortcomings. Community participation is a feature of Hong Kong's AIDS programme, though knowingly, there're still considerable amount of discrimination and non-acceptance in the community and also in service-providers. Dr Homer Tso, the Council Chairman, stressed the importance of a scientific foundation to policy development. Opinion-based policy formulation can no longer address the complexity brought on by HIV/AIDS.

For those involved in the three-day activities, the sharing had been a particularly fruitful one. All looked forward to the beginning of a new phase of collaboration within the Pearl River Delta Region.

Mainland Fellow



A total of four fellows would be visiting Hong Kong in 2000/2001 under the Lions Red Ribbon Fellow scheme, which is sponsored by Lions Club International District 303 - Hong Kong and Macau. Mr Wang Quanyi was in Hong Kong between 9 and 22 October 2000 as the first Lions Red Ribbon Fellow of the year, a project of the UNAIDS Collaborating Center based in Red Ribbon Center. He is a researcher of the Peking Union Medical College. During his stay in Hong Kong, he studied the medical and support service provision to HIV/AIDS patients in Hong Kong. A copy of the full report is available at the Red Ribbon Center' resource library to those interested in.

The second fellow was Ms Zhao Cheng Zheng who is the Associate Professor of the National Institute on Drug Dependence of the Beijing Medical University. She was in Hong Kong between 1 and 13 December 2000. During her stay in Hong Kong, she has done a comparative study on the preventive education of HIV prevention among drug abusers in Hong Kong and Mainland China. Similarly, a copy of the full report is available at the Red Ribbon Center.

World AIDS Day 2000 Positive Response

Miss Miriam Yeung, the UNAIDS Hong Kong Ambassador, has devoted a song "Positive Response" to promote acceptance of People living with HIV/AIDS. The Red Ribbon Center/UNAIDS Collaborating Center hosted a kick-off ceremony on the World AIDS Day at a shopping arcade with the event theme-Positive Response. Miss Yeung was one of the officiating guests in the ceremony. In order to echo the theme and the song, a VCD was produced and was distributed to the public especially the youth through various activities during the ceremony and some other upcoming functions.



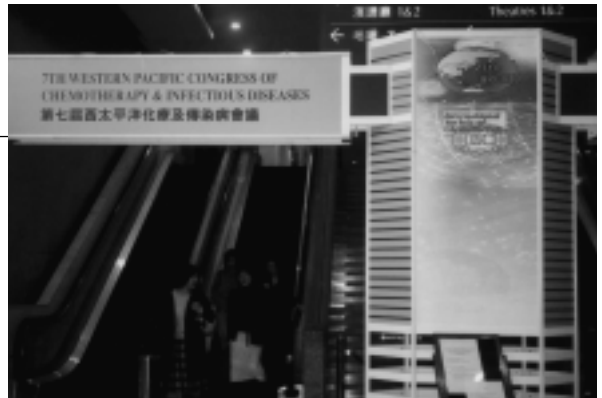
Visit from Korean Delegates



A delegate of four, led by Dr Lee Mi Kyeong, Chairperson of the General Psychiatric Department of the Institute of Forensic Psychiatry in the Republic of Korea, visited the Red Ribbon Center on 4 December 2000. One of their objectives in visiting Hong Kong was to study the treatment and rehabilitation of drug dependent persons in Hong Kong. Since risky drug taking behaviour is associated with HIV infection, they showed much interests in the HIV prevention programmes in Hong Kong especially those targeted at drug users.

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The 7th Western Pacific Congress of Chemotherapy & Infectious Diseases



The congress was held in Hong Kong from 11 to 14 December 2000. The Hong Kong Advisory Council on AIDS was one of the collaborating bodies of this scientific meeting. Apart from scientific sessions on AIDS and other infectious diseases, there was an exhibition area participated by the industry and non-profit making organisations. The Council set up an exhibition booth during the four days to display and distribute technical papers on AIDS published by the Council.