

# 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

Geneva - 21 November, 2005

Press release

## HIV INFECTION RATES DECREASING IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES BUT GLOBAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV CONTINUES TO RISE

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Increased HIV prevention and treatment efforts needed to slow and reverse AIDS epidemic, according to new UNAIDS/WHO report

**GENEVA, 21 November 2005** - There is new evidence that adult HIV infection rates have decreased in certain countries and that changes in behaviour to prevent infection - such as increased use of condoms, delay of first sexual experience and fewer sexual partners - have played a key part in these declines. The new UN report also indicates, however, that overall trends in HIV transmission are still increasing, and that far greater HIV prevention efforts are needed to slow the epidemic.

Kenya, Zimbabwe and some countries in the Caribbean region all show declines in HIV prevalence over the past few years with overall adult infection rates decreasing in Kenya from a peak of 10% in the late 1990s to 7% in 2003 and evidence of drops in HIV rates among pregnant women in Zimbabwe from 26% in 2003 to 21% in 2004. In urban areas of Burkina Faso prevalence among young pregnant women declined from around 4% in 2001 to just under 2% in 2003.

These latest findings were published in *AIDS Epidemic Update 2005*, the annual report by the

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The joint report, which this year focuses on HIV prevention, was released today in advance of World AIDS Day, marked worldwide on the first of December.

Several recent developments in the Caribbean region (in Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Dominican Republic and Haiti) give cause for guarded optimism - with some HIV prevalence declines evident among pregnant women, signs of increased condom use among sex workers and expansion of voluntary HIV testing and counselling.

Despite decreases in the rate of infection in certain countries, the overall number of people living with HIV has continued to increase in all regions of the world except the Caribbean. There were an additional five million new infections in 2005. The number of people living with HIV globally has reached its highest level with an estimated 40.3 million people, up from an estimated 37.5 million in 2003. More than three million people died of

AIDS-related illnesses in 2005; of these, more than 500 000 were children.

According to the report, the steepest increases in HIV infections have occurred in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (25% increase to 1.6 million) and East Asia. But sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the most affected globally - with 64% of new infections occurring here (over three million people).

"We are encouraged by the gains that have been made in some countries and by the fact that sustained HIV prevention programmes have played a key part in bringing down infections. But the reality is that the AIDS epidemic continues to outstrip global and national efforts to contain it," said UNAIDS Executive Director Dr Peter Piot. "It is clear that a rapid increase in the scale and scope of HIV prevention programmes is urgently needed. We must move from small projects with short-term horizons to long-term, comprehensive strategies," he added.

### **Impact of HIV Treatment**

The report recognizes that access to HIV treatment has improved markedly over the past two years. More than one million people in low- and middle-income countries are now living longer and better lives because they are on antiretroviral treatment and an estimated 250 000 to 350 000 deaths were averted this year because of expanded access to HIV treatment.

Commenting on the potential enhanced impact of integrating prevention and treatment, the 2005 report emphasizes that a comprehensive response to HIV and AIDS requires the simultaneous acceleration of treatment and prevention efforts with the ultimate goal of universal access to prevention, treatment and care.

"We can now see the clear benefit of scaling up HIV treatment and prevention together and not as isolated interventions," said WHO Director-General Dr LEE Jong-wook. "Treatment availability provides a powerful incentive for governments to support, and individuals to seek out, HIV prevention information and voluntary counselling and testing. Effective prevention can also help reduce the number of individuals who will ultimately require care, making broad access to treatment more achievable and sustainable."

### **Future challenges for strengthening HIV prevention**

New data show that in Latin America, Eastern Europe and particularly Asia, the combination of injecting drug use and sex work is fuelling epidemics, and prevention programmes are falling short of

addressing this overlap. The report shows how sustained, intensive programmes in diverse settings have helped bring about decreases in HIV incidence - among young people in Uganda and Tanzania, among sex workers and their clients in Thailand and India, and among injecting drug users in Spain and Brazil.

The report notes that, without HIV prevention measures, about 35% of children born to HIV-positive women will contract the virus. While mother-to-child transmission has been virtually eliminated from industrialized countries and service coverage is improving in many other places, it still falls far short in most of sub-Saharan Africa. An accelerated scale-up of services is urgently needed to reduce this unacceptable toll.

Levels of knowledge of safe sex and HIV remain low in many countries - even in countries with high and growing prevalence. In 24 sub-Saharan countries (including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda), two-thirds or more of young women (aged 15-24 years) lacked comprehensive knowledge of HIV transmission. According to a major survey carried out in the Philippines in 2003, more than 90% of respondents still believed that HIV could be transmitted by sharing a meal with an HIV-positive person.

Finally, weak HIV surveillance in several regions including in some countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and North Africa is hampering prevention efforts and often means that people at highest risk - men who have sex with men, sex workers, and injecting drug users - are not adequately covered or reached through HIV prevention and treatment strategies.

The annual AIDS Epidemic Update reports on the latest developments in the global AIDS epidemic. With maps and regional estimates, the 2005 edition provides the most recent estimates on the epidemic's scope and human toll, explores new trends in the epidemic's evolution, and features a special section on HIV prevention.

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**Note to editors:** The UNAIDS/WHO report is being launched in 19 cities worldwide on 21 November 2005. The main launch is being held in New Delhi, India.

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The complete report can be accessed on the UNAIDS website - [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

# Report for the " National HIV/AIDS Integrating Prevention Information Communication & Media Training Workshop "

The National HIV/AIDS Integrating Prevention Information Communication Media Training Workshop was held in Beijing on 18-19 October 2005. The Workshop was jointly organised by the National Institute of Health Education, China CDC and the National Association on STD/AIDS Prevention and Control. The aim of the Workshop is to promote the exchange of information on AIDS prevention between government departments and non-government organisations, to explore the effective mechanism for exchange of information, preventive experience sharing and putting information to its best use. Besides, the Workshop provided support and guidance for the media in developing public educational activities and promoting the effective development of the work of public educational publicity.

About 150 participants met at the Workshop to explore ways to strengthen the communication and exchange of information on AIDS prevention, and ways for the media to publicise more effectively the problems associated with AIDS. Participants included leaders of relevant government departments, representatives of international organisations, liaison officers of member units of the Working Committee for AIDS Prevention of the Ministry of State, representatives of non-government organizations in Beijing, media reporters and health system experts in Beijing etc.

The Workshop started with short speeches firstly given by the Minister of Disease Prevention of the Ministry of Health, the Head of News Office and representative of World Health Organisation in China. These were followed by the "Distributing Ceremony for the Reference Handbook for AIDS Reporting Media and the Diskette for Multi Media Inter-active Education" and the Opening Ceremony of the China HIV/AIDS Information Network"

The "Specialised Seminars" for the Workshop were divided into two parts.

The first part covered the exchange of information on AIDS prevention by non-government organizations. Participants presented the insight and experience in their respective fields. Representative of Beijing Chao Yang Qu Disease Prevention and Control Centre shared with participants the experience of base level non-government organizations in participating in AIDS prevention. Dr MAK Wai Lai of Department of Health of Hong Kong shared with participants the Red Ribbon Centre's strategies in AIDS information management and exchange. Miss LIN Oi Chu, Executive Director of the Hong Kong AIDS Foundation then made a short speech on "Using information efficiently, promoting community participation and the role of non-government organisations". Mr. YU Dong Bao, Vice Chairman of China AIDS Roadmap Tactical Support Project Office (CHARTS) introduced the participation in AIDS prevention by non-government organizations in Kenya. Lastly, Professor HUANG Ruo Tao of Beijing Chao Yang Qu Public Health Education Service Centre introduced the China HIV/AIDS Information Network, which is an internet



Dr. Darwin Mak gave a presentation in the "National HIV/AIDS Integrating Prevention Information Communication and Media Training Workshop"



Dr. Darwin Mak and Dr. Albert Au met with staff of UNAIDS China Office

platform supported by various co-operating institutions and jointly participated by many sectors of society, with the mission to promote participation by the entire society in the sharing and exchange of information concerning AIDS.

The second part of Specialized Seminars concentrated on exploring media reporting. Topics included the function of Chinese media in AIDS prevention and control, the media and healthy sex and education on AIDS for the youth and youngsters, AIDS education, prejudice and bias in media

reporting, the media and AIDS intervention among homosexual/MSM (men who have sex with men) communities.

Specialised Seminars on media reporting were also divided into eight topics for in-depth discussions. These topics are the problems of demeaning and prejudice against the infected, homosexuality, the youth and youngsters, the drug addicts, orphans, participation by non-government organizations, mother-to-child transmissions and sex workers and the promotion of use of condoms. Participants adopted interactive case studies in discussions. There were extensive analysis and heated discussions for each and every topic.

Lastly, participants discussed the ways to create more effective media, information network for public health workers and the mechanism for communication and exchange between the media and public health workers. In assessing the achievements of the Workshop, all participants agreed that media reporting has played an influential role in the exchange of information on the prevention and treatment of AIDS.



Dr. Krystal Lee

## Study tour to Hong Kong HIV surveillance and harm reduction programme by

# **Ministry of Health Malaysia and UNICEF Malaysia**

Headed by Datuk Dr. Chua Soi Lek, the Minister of Health and Miss Gaye Phillips, Representative of UNICEF Malaysia, a delegation consisting eight officials from the Ministry of Health Malaysia and UNICEF Malaysia paid a study visit to Hong Kong HIV surveillance and harm reduction programme on 15 to 17 December 2005.

A study was initiated as harm reduction measures as one priority to stop the spread of HIV/ AIDS in Malaysia recently. In fact, a pilot methadone substitution program had been held since October 2005. A needle-syringe exchange and condom promotion program will be launched in early 2006. Although these are the 'standard' measures for HIV



prevention globally, this is a strong challenge for the Muslim community, like Malaysia.

Colleagues from Hong Kong and Malaysia were all excited about the tight schedule for this study tour! To kick off the two and a half day study tour, the delegates met with more than ten colleagues from Headquarters of Department of Health, including Dr PY Lam, Director of Health, Dr PY Leung, Controllor of Centre for Health Protection, Dr WL Lim, Head of Public Health Laboratory and Dr Cindy Lai, Assistant Director of Health. They discussed about the health systems in both places in context of HIV prevention and care and drug treatment. The delegates later met with Prof CN CHEN, Chairman of the ACA ; Dr Susan FAN, Convener of the Community Forum on AIDS; Prof YL LAU, Chairman of the Scientific Committee on AIDS and STIs. They discussed the role and operation of the Advisory Council on AIDS in Hong Kong. To provide an overview of drug control and prevention policy, the delegates met with Mrs Rosanna Ure, Commissioner for Narcotics of Security Bureau. This session turned out to be very impressive for the delegates because this seemed to be what they lack - a coordinating and policy making unit for comprehensive drug prevention and treatment in Malaysia. Datuk Dr Chua and the delegates also had a lunch meeting with Dr York CHOW, Secretary for the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau.

The delegates then visited Red Ribbon Centre and Integrated Treatment Centre. They discussed in details about HIV surveillance system, clinical governance and training activities. They also visited three methadone clinics and met with Dr YW Chan, Chief Staff Officer of Auxiliary Medical Service and social workers to understand the operations of methadone clinics in Hong Kong. In addition, they met with Mr Peter Pi, Executive Director of SARDA to understand the role of social workers in implementing harm reduction programme. They also met with Dr. KM Ho of social hygiene clinics to understand how the STI clinics provide invaluable data to HIV surveillance system.

The participants have found the study tour useful and comprehensive, despite a very tight schedule indeed. The most impressive issue is the employment of Auxiliary Medical Service (a team of trained layman) to scale up methadone maintenance programme by keeping the cost low. Besides, the vigorous use of evidence in programme development, monitoring of Hong Kong AIDS programme, comprehensive drug control and treatment plan by the Narcotics Division of the Security Bureau are also impressive to them. The study has not only benefited the delegates, but also provided an interactive training opportunity for local workers to organise our experiences, in turns to recognise and improve our strengths and weaknesses .



A delegation from the Malaysian Ministry of Health and UNICEF visited Red Ribbon Centre



# Lions Red Ribbon Fellows

2005

With the sponsorship of the Lions Clubs International Hong Kong and Macau District 303, seven Lions Red Ribbon Fellows have visited us in 2005 to further their professional development and to study HIV / AIDS control in Hong Kong. There were intense experience sharing and technical exchange on HIV / AIDS control between them and local AIDS workers. Besides, collaboration and networking were developed during their visits. They were Miss Sharon Zhong, Mr. Tan Cong, Dr. Tan Jing-guang, Dr. Xin Tian-yi, Dr. Wu Guo-xian, Miss Meng Xian-rong and Dr. Shi Shan.

All fellows presented the situation of HIV / AIDS in their places in seminars during their stay. This enabled local workers to have more in-depth understanding on the epidemiology and current situations in different parts of the mainland China, including Henan, Guangxi, Sichuan and Shenzhen. Moreover, they introduced their work and HIV projects to us.

The first batch of fellows in 2005 included Miss Sharon Zhong and Mr. Tan Cong. Both were Program Coordinators from the Future Group Europe. Miss Zhong was from the Chengdu Office, while Mr. Tan was from the Beijing Office. They

worked in projects on social marketing of condoms and also HIV prevention programmes in high risk populations in Sichuan and Yunnan. Their objectives were to understand the roles of non-governmental organizations (NGO) in HIV prevention and care in Hong Kong, especially towards sex workers and drug users. Secondly, to understand the collaboration between the government and NGO. During their two weeks' study, they have visited different AIDS services, Social Hygiene Service and different NGO, including Society for AIDS Care, Zi-teng, CHOICE, Action for Reach Out, etc. They also shared with us the promotion of condom use in several places in China.

Dr. Tan Jing-guang is a public health physician working in Shenzhen Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). He is responsible for HIV prevention programmes among the MSM (men who have sex with men) group. He came with the aim of looking at our prevention programmes among the MSM group. He had visited several AIDS services and NGO working with the MSM community in Hong Kong, including AIDS Concern, Hong Kong AIDS Foundation, Chi Heng Foundation, etc. He also joined one of the meetings of a MSM group. He was impressed by the role of NGO in reaching MSM to

deliver preventive messages. In his seminar, he presented the results of a behavioural survey among the MSM community in Shenzhen. It is important for us to know more about the present situation in Shenzhen because Hong Kong citizens cross the border for work and recreation is so common nowadays.

Dr. Wu Guo-xian and Dr. Xin Tian-yi were doctors from Shenqiu CDC in Henan. They aimed to learn about the



The Lions Red Ribbon Fellow Dr. Tan Jing-guang shared his experience on HIV/AIDS prevention in a seminar

overall HIV care and prevention programme in Hong Kong. They have visited Red Ribbon Centre, Yau Ma Tei Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centre, NGO including Medecins Sans Frontieres (HK), AIDS Concern, Hong Kong AIDS Foundation, etc. They shared with us a community care and support programme in villages with high prevalence in Henan.

The last two Lions Fellows in 2005 were Dr. Shi Shan and Ms. Meng Xian-rong from Nanning of Guangxi. Dr. Shi is a physician of Nanning Red Cross Hospital of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomy Region and is in charge of the Methadone Treatment Programme in Nanning. She came to Hong Kong with Ms. Meng, who is the Vice Leader of the Drug Reconnaissance Section of Drug Reconnaissance Section of Nanning Public Security Bureau. Their objectives were to learn about the harm reduction programme and its social marketing strategy in HIV prevention. The

Methadone Clinic in Nanning is one of the 8 pilot sites in China and was just started in June 2004. During their stay, they have visited a methadone clinic and NGOs providing services to drug users, including Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation for Drug Abusers, the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Pui Hong Self-help Association, etc. They also talked to staff of the Narcotics Division of the Security Bureau on control of drug abuse in Hong Kong. Luckily, they also had a chance to look at outreach activity of the Phoenix Project and join World AIDS Day Programme in Hong Kong!

Since its launch in 1999, there were altogether 37 Lions Red Ribbon Fellows completed attachments in Hong Kong. As there are increased linkage and cross border travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland China, the Red Ribbon Fellows will continue to serve as an important bridge for sharing and networking between Hong Kong and China.

The joys of being negative:

## UNICEF's

### PPTCT programme in India

Maltati, a 25-year-old mother, has HIV. She realized herself being infected with HIV when, seven months pregnant with her second child, she went to the hospital in nearby Guntur, a town in India's southern Andhra Pradesh state.

#### **From "knowing nothing" to "knowing what to do"**

Maltati didn't know what AIDS was at the time when she was told. When a female counselor of the

hospital explained it to her, she felt overwhelmingly depressed. "But when she told me what I could do to have a healthy baby, I felt better," Maltati said.

For Maltati, the "to do" list involved counseling sessions, swallowing one tablet of the potent drug Nevirapine during delivery, and postnatal visits to the hospital to check on her health. For her newborn, it meant an oral dose of Nevirapine shortly after birth, and a blood test to check for the presence of HIV infection, after 18 months.



## Bringing a great hope

Maltati dutifully followed each step. When her son, Kisan was a year and half old, she had him tested for the virus. The result: negative.

"Knowing my son doesn't have HIV gives me great hope," Maltati said, breaking out into a radiant smile. Maltati is full of praise for the hospital, the doctor and Nagalakshmi, her counselor. "They looked after me very well. I am sure that my son does not have HIV because of them."

## UNICEF in action - PPTCT in progress

UNICEF had played a major role in this success story - behind the scenes. The hospital where Maltati gave birth is one of the many centers offering the Prevention of parent-to-child transmission (PPTCT) of HIV/AIDS program supported by UNICEF. The PPTCT has successfully trimmed the transmission rate to newborns from 30 per cent - the rate without any intervention - to less than 10 per cent.

"Many of the women and children have benefited from this programme and I have the statistics to prove it," said Dr. Vasanth Kumar, head of the hospital's Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Dr. Kumar inspires confidence. From the warm way in which he talks to patients and staff, it is obvious he cares about them, and his work. "I always say that UNICEF is doing a human service to many women, especially the HIV-infected individuals."

There are currently 300 facilities nationwide with PPTCT on offer. UNICEF funds the training of medical teams on all aspects of HIV/AIDS, providing antiretroviral drugs to mothers and babies, offering voluntary blood testing and counseling for HIV/AIDS.

## When smile returns...

Maltati has returned from a visit to the hospital, having spoken with Nagalakshmi, who always cheers her up. "HIV-positive women depend on us to make decisions. I have to help them to make their own decisions and this is the most critical

thing," said Nagalakshmi.

Maltati now feels physically fine, though she's a little tired. Looking closely at her boy, with a hint of a smile she says softly "the most important thing is that my children are healthy."

## UNICEF's Global Campaign on Children & AIDS

PPTCT is one of the main focuses of the UNICEF's global campaign of "UNITE FOR CHILDREN, UNITE AGAINST AIDS". The campaign will provide a child-focused framework for four urgent imperatives that can make a real difference in the lives and life chances of children affected by HIV/AIDS. The "Four Ps" of this campaign are:

- \* Prevent parent-to-child HIV transmission - By 2010, offer appropriate services to 80 per cent of women in need
- \* Provide paediatric treatment - By 2010, provide either antiretroviral treatment or cotrimoxazole, or both, to 80 per cent of children in need
- \* Prevent infection among adolescents and young people - By 2010, reduce the percentage of young people living with HIV by 25 per cent globally
- \* Protect and support children affected by HIV/AIDS - By 2010, reach 80 per cent of children most in need

To support and to know more about the UNICEF's Global Campaign on Children & AIDS, please contact us:

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