

# 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

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Press release

## UNAIDS acknowledges good progress on **AIDS in China and urges continued commitment and community mobilisation**

**Beijing, China, 17 June 2007** - The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) today acknowledged that good progress has been made in China's response to AIDS, presenting special awards to China's Vice Minister of Health, Dr Wang Longde and Professor Zhang Beichuan from Qingdao University, for their leadership on AIDS issues.

At an award ceremony held in the Chinese capital, Beijing, UNAIDS Executive Director Peter Piot congratulated Dr Longde and Professor Zhang for their dedication and commitment to helping China get ahead of its AIDS epidemic and establish a multi-sectoral response.

"As I visit countries around the world, I witness time and again that strong and committed leadership brings progress in the AIDS response. Leaders are distinguished by their action, innovation and vision; their personal example and engagement of others; and, their perseverance in the face of obstacles and challenges," he said.

"Today I am honored to present awards to two pioneers, who have been at the forefront of the AIDS response in the country and who have encouraged others to follow," he added.

China's Vice Minister of Health responsible for AIDS since 2004, Dr Wang Longde has been instrumental in making a response to AIDS a priority for China. He has placed particular emphasis on ensuring a multi-sectoral approach to AIDS and encouraging a range of partners to join China's response.

Professor Zhang Beichuan from Qingdao University has undertaken ground-breaking work in raising HIV awareness among men who have sex with men, breaking down stigma and discrimination against people at high risk of HIV infection and developing focused HIV prevention programmes.

"This kind of enlightened leadership on AIDS is critical to getting ahead of the epidemic and keeping the challenges

AIDS presents high in the minds of policy makers and the general public,” said Dr Piot. “As well as governments, non-governmental organizations and people living with HIV are essential partners in an effective response to AIDS,” he said.

## **UNAIDS country mission**

The UNAIDS award ceremony took place as part of a week-long country visit to China by UNAIDS Executive Director, to learn more about how the country is intensifying and moving its response to AIDS forward. The mission travelled through Henan, one of the provinces most affected by AIDS-visiting Shangcai county and the provincial capital Zhengzhou - where Dr Piot met with people living with HIV who became infected through blood trade in the 1990s, AIDS orphans, NGOs and representatives of civil society as well as government officials and health professionals.

## **Uniting the world against AIDS**

Following the Henan mission, Dr Piot travelled on to the Chinese capital Beijing. Over the next days he will meet with Chinese government officials and hold talks with Chinese AIDS experts, key opinion makers as well as people living with HIV.

During the week long trip, UNAIDS Executive Director is highlighting a number of key issues such as the need for continued leadership on AIDS, the need for focused HIV prevention programmes to reach people most at risk of HIV and the continued need to reduce AIDS-related stigma and discrimination in China.

“ I am confident that China can continue scaling up its response to AIDS, focusing programmes to reach the people that need them most, involving people living with HIV and “making the money work”- ensuring the funding available for AIDS is used most effectively and efficiently. It is still early to tell, but China might just be turning the corner on AIDS”, said Dr Piot.

UNAIDS has been supporting efforts to curb the AIDS epidemic in China for over ten years. As part of the mission, Dr Piot will also discuss United Nations continued support to China and promote the new ‘UN Joint Programme on AIDS’ that has been developed in the country. The new programme includes a clear division of labour between UN agencies working on AIDS and aims at ensuring that the United Nations ‘delivers as one’ on AIDS.

“As China’s response develops, so does the UN response within the country. Increased coordination will enable us all to be more effective. We look forward to supporting China in its response to AIDS and working together with China in expanding the global response to AIDS, particularly in Africa”, UNAIDS Executive Director said.

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*UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations to respond to AIDS. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through the UN theme groups, and the joint programmes on AIDS. Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. For more information please visit the UNAIDS web site at [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org) and [www.unaids.org.cn](http://www.unaids.org.cn).*



# Bravo, Our True Heroes!

## - Sharing of the China Training Project -

Since its establishment in 1991, the Hong Kong AIDS Foundation, apart from actively promoting AIDS prevention and education in Hong Kong, because of the close linkage between Hong Kong and the Mainland and the belief that education is the key to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS and eradicate discrimination, has also organised AIDS training programmes for Mainland AIDS workers, both in Hong Kong and on the Mainland, to share with them our knowledge, techniques, and experiences of AIDS prevention and education with a view to enhancing their understanding in the areas of HIV/AIDS basic knowledge, medical treatment, preventive education, role of health professionals, caring and counselling services for AIDS patients.

Besides, the Foundation also launched the internship programme for Mainland AIDS workers since 2000 to provide an opportunity for them to gain a better understanding of and participate in the AIDS prevention and education work of the Foundation in Hong Kong. In 2005, the “Alumni Association - China Training Project” was established to provide a platform for Mainland workers to share their working experiences. Although the Foundation was under manpower and resources constraint during the past decade, our colleagues have nonetheless travelled across more than 30 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in Mainland China to provide training for more than 6,000 workers. We are pleased and encouraged to see that frontline workers, government officials, health professionals, and Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) workers have given us their fervent support and actively participated in different training programmes.

In mid-September, I participated with my colleagues in a three-day “AIDS Capacity Building Seminar cum the 2nd Meeting of the Alumni Association - China Training Project” organised by the Foundation and held in Lanzhou, Gansu. Nearly 100 workers, academics,

and experts from over 20 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions attended the seminar. We were pleased to have the following officiating guests at this seminar: Professor Hao Shenghua, Head of the Health Bureau of Gansu Province; Secretary Shen Jie from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention; Professor Dai Zhicheng, Head of the Chinese Association of STD and AIDS Prevention and Control; Dr. C. H. Leong, Chairman of the Hong Kong AIDS

Foundation; Mr. Roger Lau, Vice-chairman of the Hong Kong AIDS Foundation; Mr. Yeung Chun-yip, Member of the Hong Kong Committee for China AIDS Initiative; and Professor Xu Lianzhi, Representative of the Alumni Association.

During the seminar, Professor Liao Susu from the Peking Union Medical College and Professor Meng Lei, Deputy Director of the Gansu Center for Disease

Control and Prevention have shared with us about the progress of AIDS intervention work on the Mainland and the prevention and control measures of AIDS in Gansu province respectively. AIDS workers from various provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions also shared their experiences and progress in promoting HIV/AIDS prevention and education targeting at different high-risk groups. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to share with the participants about the rationale and content of the “Man-d Project”, a sexual health programme organised by the Foundation for men who have sex with men (MSM). On the last day of the seminar, participants discussed frankly and positively during the case study session problems they have encountered when implementing HIV/AIDS preventive education programmes, in particular, regarding AIDS preventive education for MSM and the promotion of voluntary HIV antibody testing and counselling services.

I have gained a better understanding of the progress of AIDS prevention and control work on the Mainland



*Mr. Brian Wong (first left), Deputy Chief Executive (Programmes) of the Hong Kong AIDS Foundation, taking photo with the inaugural guests, colleague from the Foundation and member of the Alumni Association at the seminar venue.*

through this seminar and the preparatory work. I met many enthusiastic frontline AIDS workers and was very impressed by their professionalism and dedication. At the evening banquet on the last day of the seminar, together with another colleague from the Foundation, we paid tribute to these true heroes for their selfless devotion to AIDS prevention and control through singing the following song:

*Who are the true heroes under the bright sky?*

*Ordinary people touch me deeply*

*Seize every minute of your life!*

*Pursue your dreams relentlessly*

*How could we see the rainbow without going through the rain?*

*No one would succeed without sweat and tears*

*Seize every touching moment of your life!*

*Embrace your dear friends with passion*

*Let our true feelings and tears of happiness*

*Echo in our hearts*

*- "True Heroes"*

Remarks: If you are interested to know more about the Foundation's China Training Project, please visit HYPERLINK "<http://www.hkaf.com>" [www.hkaf.com](http://www.hkaf.com) or refer to the Foundation's booklet "Compendium of Hong Kong AIDS Foundation China Project" published in September this year.



# An Extraordinary Journey

Ms. Flora Tse (Nursing Officer)

I visit Malaysia every year and this year was no exception. However, the visit this year was a bit different from those of past years. I had to attend an infection control conference in Kuala Lumpur before continuing with my usual itinerary. The conference was the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Congress of the Asia Pacific Society of Infection Control, and was hosted by the Ministry of Health Malaysia, the Malaysian Society of Infectious Diseases and Chemotherapy and the Infection Control Association of Malaysia. It was sponsored by the Asia Pacific Society of Infection Control and co-hosted by other infection control units. The conference lasted for four days with each day having a packed schedule. Some sessions began as early as 7am, such as "Meet The Expert", and some activities ended as late as 10:30pm, the "Industrial Symposium Dinner" for example. I never knew that daybreak in Kuala Lumpur was late until I went to the hall to attend the "Meet The Expert" session and I discovered that dawn in Kuala Lumpur was stunningly beautiful.

I am not used to attending full day conferences and as the schedule was packed yet intensely rewarding, I ended up being very tired after each day of conference activities. Representatives from numerous countries were more than happy to share with us how they promote infection control measures, the challenges they face in implementation, and the way they confront and then solve the problems. The sharing of such experiences



allowed all the participants to feel their enthusiasm and determination. Even representatives from some developing countries were willing to share with us their infection control situations, some of which are quite incredible. During lunchtime, we chatted with new acquaintances, discussed infection control measures in different regions, and the overall atmosphere was amazing.

Notwithstanding the rich content of the conference, there came a time when the conference had to end. After four days of sharing, discussion and research, the conference closed with encouraging applause. The implementation of infection control is not without its difficulties, but all of us firmly believe in its importance and hope to put into practice the experiences that we shared so that each and every medical practitioner can play a part in improving infection control.



# ACA CHAIRMAN'S TRIP TO SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA

Dr. Raymond Ho

Early in September, Professor Chen Char Nie, in his capacity as Chairman of Advisory Council on AIDS, was invited to speak at a 3-day regional workshop on the 'Practical approaches to the effective treatment of drug addiction in Asia'. Dr Raymond Ho, Senior Medical Officer in Department of Health's Special Preventive Programme, accompanied Professor Chen to this educational meeting, which was held in Siem Reap Cambodia from 13-15 September 2007. Last year, Dr Clive Chan joined Professor Chen to a similar workshop held in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

The main objectives of the regional workshop included:-

- Review emerging trends and responses to drug use in the Asian Region
- Review pharmacological treatments of opioid dependence
- Review effective methods for monitoring treatment progress
- Review effective treatment approaches for alcohol dependence
- Review psychopharmacology of recreational drugs including methamphetamine
- Consider governance requirements for safe and effective pharmacological treatments of opioid dependence
- Examine techniques for interviewing and care planning
- Examine techniques for mentoring and staff supervision.

The meeting was officially declared opened by the Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia. There were delegates from Australia, United Kingdom, USA, Vietnam, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, the Republic of Laos, Mainland China and Taiwan, and the host country Cambodia. Most of the delegates are psychiatrists by profession, but also included physicians, public health doctors, academics, general practitioners, non-governmental organization workers and anti-drug stakeholders.

Professor Chen delivered his talk on the opening day on 'Psychiatric care for HIV/AIDS patients in Hong Kong'.

Having been an honorary psychiatric consultant for DH since the early 2000s, Professor Chen presented his study on the mental health profile of HIV/AIDS patients visiting Integrated Treatment Centre at Kowloon Bay. He was also invited by the organizers to share his experiences with delegates on the methadone programme in Hong Kong in a 2-hour workshop. Having championed for the expansion of harm reduction programmes for injecting drug users for over 20 years, Professor Chen was pleased to witness the introduction of methadone treatment programmes in many neighbouring countries and the Mainland in recent years. Currently, our local hosts are also contemplating the introduction of methadone treatment programme in Cambodia.

The workshop participants share their experiences in different approaches to drug addiction treatment, but it becomes evident as the discussion goes on that methadone treatment programme is an affordable, accessible and safe form of harm reduction approach to improve the social functional capacities of heroin drug abusers enrolled in the programme. With a high retention rate, the methadone programme could help its attendees to remain in jobs, foster family and social relationships and reduce their health risks to serious infectious diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B and C. While it is heartening to see the introduction of methadone clinics in many countries, we must be cautious that methadone clinics may fail to deliver their harm reduction and social objectives if the treatment programme has stringent admission criteria and poor coverage.

Siem Reap is small charming gateway town to the world famous heritage the Angkor temples. Thanks to those attractions, Siem Reap has transformed itself into a major tourist hub. Siem Reap nowadays is a vibrant town with modern hotels and architectures. Despite international influences, Siem Reap and its people have conserved much of the town's image, culture and traditions. While the 3-day workshop was tightly scheduled with plenary sessions of lectures and experience sharing workshops, there were also cultural evenings organized for the delegates to sample the Cambodia culture, traditions and cuisine.

# OUR SUMMER TIME IN RED RIBBON CENTRE

This summer, the Yale-China/ New Asia College Public Service Exchange brought two students – Ida Chow from CUHK and Takudzwa Shumba from Yale University to Red Ribbon Center for four weeks. We were both interested in the AIDS pandemic globally, and specifically with how it is being addressed in Hong Kong and the U.S.

Our project at RRC entailed increasing HIV awareness and promoting testing among men who have sex with men (MSM). In spite of low HIV prevalence in Hong Kong, there is concern about rising infection rates among MSM, hence the targeted approach adopted by RRC. We were tasked with finding out about MSM-specific testing services in Hong Kong and creating a resource toolkit that would summarize them and encourage MSM to test routinely by showing the testing environment to be non-threatening. The testing toolkit would then be available for use by outreach workers on the Internet as well as in bar and sauna settings. To create the kit, we first needed to understand the MSM culture in Hong Kong and decide which would be the most appropriate means of information dissemination. This was rather challenging because of the “triple stigmatization” associated with being homosexual, using drugs recreationally and being at increased HIV risk. In addition, homosexuality still remains an uncomfortable topic in many societies and applying the spotlight to individuals that are normally at the periphery was complex. We also became thoroughly familiar with the testing organizations, the services they offered and what demographic they were hoping to serve by conducting interviews and touring the various organizations.

We created a resource kit containing pertinent information about the testing services, as well as a pictorial depiction of how the procedure varies at the different organizations. Another important aspect of the

project was deciding what sort of message would be the best for encouraging MSM to test routinely. The image of a young, attractive and immensely popular young MSM would pop into one’s mind – he has few obligations and his life is blissfully happy. What benefit is there for him if he tests positive and destroys this paradise? In the end,

we settled for “Be responsible – for yourself, your family, your friends and potential lovers” as a means of showing that HIV is more than just an individual concern and in the long-run, the effect of decisions extends beyond only one person. At the end of our internship, we presented to key stakeholders and were able to

see the finished Cantonese version of the toolkit.

The second part of our internship was at Leeway, an AIDS nursing home in New Haven, where we were directly involved with palliative care. Our interactions with various people during the internship provided important lessons that will prove invaluable in the future. Many preconceptions we had before were challenged – in the way that fresh experiences provide satisfaction but also create a longing to grasp and understand questions newly raised. Prevention campaigns and patient care are at different ends in the continuum of ways to address the AIDS pandemic, but both very effective. In Ida’s future career as a Chinese medicine practitioner and mine as a health professional in my home country, Zimbabwe, we hope to employ the cultural sensitivity obtained during this exchange and make use of our diversity of experience to bring sustainable change and improvements in healthcare. We are also not alone in our hope that the day is approaching when the divide that exists because of HIV is a thing of the past.

Remarks: Ida Chow and Takudzwa Shumba are students from Yale University and New Asia College, Chinese University of Hong Kong. They joined a summer exchange programme by Yale-China and New Asia College and completed their internship at Red Ribbon Centre in June, 2007.

