"Be Negative" HIV/HCV Awareness Campaign

April 2015

Background

The HIV infection cases newly reported to Department of Health (DH) in 2013 was 559, which was record high in the past 30 years. Moreover, in the second half of 2013, a cluster of seven cases of recent hepatitis C infection in HIV-infected men who have sex with men (MSM) was detected at the Integrated Treatment Centre (ITC) of DH. None of them had history of injecting drug use. Sexual transmission was considered as the likely route of infection.

From 2002 to 2012, DH only recorded eight cases of HCV infection among the HIV infected patients followed up in ITC. The seven cases described above showed an upsurge of HIV/HCV co-infection. In response to this, an HIV/HCV awareness campaign was launched by the DH Red Ribbon Centre (RRC) in August to November 2014. Titled "Be Negative", this Campaign carried a notion of "staying negative from HIV and HCV". All people, no matter gay or straight, positive or negative, could play an active role in the fight against the diseases.

Objectives of the Campaign

► To raise awareness of HIV and HCV among MSM; and
► To promote safer sex and condom use among MSM.

Details of the Campaign

1. Promotional materials

Four key messages were developed, each with a graphic representation:

- **Be loving**: love and protect yourself, and your partner;
- **Be safe**: condom use is the most effective way to prevent HIV so always use one;
- **Be bright**: HCV can be sexually transmitted and can cause liver diseases, HIV and HCV co-infection is more difficult to treat; and
- **Be quick**: get HIV tested!
Promotional materials included a poster series (Figure 1), pamphlets, condom gift packs, alert cards, tissue paper, Tee-shirt and tote bag, etc.

Fig. 1 Poster series
A mini-website (www.benegative.hk, now archived in www.21171069.com at https://www.21171069.com/benegative/eng/index.html) was developed to provide information on HIV and HCV, comparison among hepatitis A, B and C, safer sex, sexually transmitted infections, and available HIV testing services (Figure 2).

Fig. 2 Mini-website on hepatitis C

2. Channels of delivery

Apart from public clinics (including 3 HIV clinics and 6 Social Hygiene Clinics), 7 NGOs that provide services to MSM, with 36 gay venues including bar, sauna and massage parlour, 5 gay-friendly shops including sex shop, book shop, cafe and restaurant were invited to display the posters and distribute pamphlets, condom packs and other giveaway items.

Two important events, namely Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (HKLGFF) and Pride Parade, are held each year and have been used as effective publicity channels to reach the MSM community.

HKLGFF was held in September 2014. RRC collaborated with the organiser and supported two movies and an animated advertisement promoting condom use which was shown before each screening. An exhibition was set up in the waiting area of the
cinema; photos of gay men with a negative sign painted on the body were showcased, and promotional materials were displayed for free distribution. An estimated 7,000 moviegoers were reached.

The Pride Parade was held in November 2014. A reception table was set at the starting point in Victoria Park and two booths were set at the finishing point in Tamar Park where participants could take snapshots and get souvenirs. A group of workers holding up slogan boards and banner marched with the condom mascots all the way. According to the organiser, 8,900 people joined the Parade.

To make the publicity plan complete, electronic media must make a component. Web banners were advertised on gay websites and magazines; an animated advertisement was broadcast on a gay-friendly channel. The campaign was also promoted on social media such as Facebook (Figure 3), Instagram and YouTube to widen its reach.

Fig. 3 Be Negative Facebook page

3. Evaluation

An NGO was commissioned to carry out a questionnaire survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the Campaign. A total of 213 MSM was recruited, 147 from venue-outreach and 66 from Internet-outreach. Over 60% of the respondents were aged 29 or below and 89% were Chinese.

Among the respondents, 22% had come across the publicity material. The most popular channels were gay bars, LGBT events, NGOs, the Internet and gay saunas.
The most frequently received promotional materials were safer sex kit (condom and lubricant), poster and tissue paper. Among those who knew of the Campaign through the Internet, gay websites and social media were the most important platforms.

Compared with those who had not come across the Campaign, respondents who had been exposed to the publicity materials showed better knowledge of HCV, though they did not show a significant change in risk perception of HCV infection or condom use in anal sex.

4. HCV testing

One NGO carried out an HCV education and testing programme in 2014-2015. A total of 435 MSM were recruited for HCV antibody testing. All were Chinese and 71% of them were aged 30 years. One of them was screened HCV positive making the prevalence at 0.23%. He was referred to the Princess Margaret Hospital for follow-up and treatment.

No strong association between HCV infection and known risk factors, such as fisting, use of alcohol or recreational drugs was found, likely due to the small sample size. However, risk perception of HCV infection was low. In particular, the confirmed case of HCV infection perceived himself to have very low risk of being infected at the beginning.