

Legislative Council: Panel On Health Services
Meeting 12 March 2007 On Prevention and Control of AIDS

Submitted by: Society For AIDS Care

The Society for AIDS Care was founded in 1994 and it is an AIDS NGO in the Direct Patient Care Sector in Hong Kong that provides for care, support and rehabilitation of HIV patients in the community within and outside normal clinic hours

Dr. Honorable Joseph Lee

The recent reported infection rate from the Department of Health for 2006 has been the highest increase annual figure ever reported. More than one new infection per day has been reported for the period.

Among the different routes of infections, it is significant to note of the addition of 2 new cases through Perinatal infection. This is the first infected case reported since Hong Kong has commenced adopting universal testing for all pregnant women. Proper therapeutic treatment measures provided for pregnant mothers during the antenatal period as well as follow up with prophylactic treatment given for the infant after birth reduced the probability of close to zero infection rates in Hong Kong.

In view of the increase, AIDS NGOs in the Direct Patient Care Sector are under enormous pressure for the demand of services. Those working on the Prevention Sector also met with great stress to combat the sharp increase. The AIDS Trust Fund established in 1989 with 350 Million provides for project funding for AIDS work in Hong Kong. However, despite the rapid case increases, allocation to AIDS NGO in the Direct Care Patient Sector remains at the year 2000 level.

Problems need to be addressed for Perinatal infection:

1. With the increasing numbers of new born babies being delivered in Hong Kong by mainland mothers, it is essential to ensure these women have undergone reputable HIV testing in their early pregnancies. Although recently, new measures were employed by the government for ensuring mainland pregnant women who are delivering their babies in Hong Kong to register with local hospitals and have prior antenatal care, there are no corresponding measures to provide proper treatment/preventive measures if these women are tested HIV positive to reduce

possible infection of the new born. Prevention of vertical mother to child infection not only save guard the quality of life for the infant and his/her family but also contribute to a life long saving of medical and relating fees for Hong Kong in a long run.

2. Similar to other married couples, some HIV+ve couples/ +ve individual with –ve partner long for continuation of their family too. In our neighboring countries such as Japan and Taiwan, different preventative safety measures were given to these couples in order to minimize the risk of perinatal infection. These measures include sperm wash and therapeutic family child rearing counseling. Whilst Hong Kong so far has not investigated into these services, some HIV+ve couples/ +ve individual with –ve partner are engaged in high risk pregnancies. It is time for Hong Kong too to provide such facilities so that these couples could no longer need to undertake unnecessary risk. Again, more +ve babies being born will no doubt contribute to huge financial burden to the Hong Kong health and relating services in a long run.

Funding Problems need to be addressed for Direct Care and Prevention of HIV/AIDS

Reduction of ‘Stigma and Discrimination’ of AIDS is still something in need to be addressed urgently in Hong Kong. Despite various efforts conducted, many patients are not ready to disclose their positive identity to even their families and partners. Fear of discrimination deter these patients to enjoy the same social rights as the others, as a result, many patients choose to live in isolation, some prefer to break away from their normal social circle and a lot of families are faced with shame, anger and uncertainties of their future lives. AIDS Care NGOs work with each patient on an individual/family basis. Education and targeted programs are provided on better coping skills, encouragement of positive living as well as the importance of adopting safer sex practice to all service users. Successful implementation of these programs by AIDS NGO encourages patients to better care for themselves, their partners and integrate into the community. At the same time, more aggressive AIDS acceptance promotion programs conducted jointly by the government and NGOs to the public are required to contribute to a more harmonious Hong Kong society.

In order to continue to sustain these vital services, a better infrastructure on how the government is committed to support the service deem essential. The current AIDS Trust Fund has a commitment to keep Hong Kong a low prevalent city, however, bounded by its own mandate; it does not seem to be able to response to the need of community more readily in its funding process. Despite the rapid case increases,

allocation to AIDS NGO in the Direct Care Patient Sector remains at the year 2000 level.

Its current allocation policy for the vital patient ongoing services in a 3 yearly manner creates unnecessary bureaucracy and uncertainties for many AIDS NGO and patients.

It would be essential for the government to consider launching a comprehensive review of its funding structure with special attention to support essential patient service and prevention programs with **Recurrent Funding**. Better transparency on its funding mechanism and allocation would help AIDS NGO to better plan and implement its work strategies.

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