

Legislative Council: Panel On Health Services

Meeting 5 February 2018

Topic: HIV and AIDS response measures formulated in relation to the Recommended HIV/AIDS Strategies for Hong Kong (2017-2021)

Submitted by: The Society for AIDS Care

The Society for AIDS Care (SAC) was founded in 1994 and it is an AIDS NGO in the Direct Patient Care Sector in Hong Kong that provides home care, psychological support, rehabilitation and day care centre service for HIV patients and care-givers in the community.

Dr. Honorable Joseph Lee

There are 8,952 HIV infected cases accumulated as reported in 2017 3rd Quarter HIV situation according to the Department of Health and it reflects there is still an upward trend in the infected situation in Hong Kong. Among the newly infected cases, SAC has great concern for women infected cases and new cases through perinatal infection.

The needs for women to receive HIV/AIDS preventive education and HIV Antibody Testing service:

- 1) Men who have sex with men (MSM) is the primary target population among existing HIV infected cases in Hong Kong. MSM dominated the epidemic and accounted for 60% of the reported cases in 2016. However, in newly reported heterosexual HIV infections, the female to male ratio has increased from 0.5:1 to 0.81:1, reflecting an increasing number of female being infected.
- 2) Among existing HIV infected cases served by SAC, female cases account for 40% of total cases served. Most of them belong to middle-aged group and discovered their infected status after receiving HIV antibody testing when their husband had confirmed diagnosis. Generally, they lack of knowledge on HIV/AIDS prevention and have no bargaining power in using condoms when having sex with their husbands. Moreover, they do not aware the importance in having regular HIV antibody test.
- 3) Council for the AIDS Trust Fund (ATF) makes reference to recommendations of the Strategies in funding allocation to AIDS NGOs in serving targeted high risk population. As general women population has not been classified as one

of the targeted population, no resource is allocated for service rendered to them. SAC strongly urge ATF not only to concern the high risk groups, but also the needs of women in receiving HIV/AIDS preventive education and getting support for HIV antibody testing service.

Problems need to be addressed for perinatal infection:

- 1) At present, there is around 98% coverage of Universal Antenatal HIV Antibody Testing Programme (UATP) in Hong Kong. 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 infant infection in Hong Kong. However, there were still five infants to be infected with HIV from 2009 to 2015. Their mothers were screened negative by UATP during the early antenatal period, so they were suspected to have been infected in later pregnancy stage. As to achieve zero infant HIV infection in Hong Kong, it is essential to provide re-testing service for pregnant women in later pregnancy stage.

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.