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## **Policy Comment: HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health Training**

Health professionals specializing in HIV/AIDS prevention should have training in Sexual Health, so that they could have an integrated vision of the determinants of human sexual behavior. Among other skills, professionals should be aware of personal attitudes towards one own and other person's sexuality and offer a respectful attitude towards persons with different sexual orientations and sexual practices.

## **Prices of ARV in 15 Latin America and Caribbean Countries Show Big Discrepancies**

PAHO survey of the prices of drugs used for antiretroviral (ARV) therapy in 15 Latin America and Caribbean countries showed huge discrepancies. A 200 mg capsule of Efavirenz, for instance, ranged from US\$ 0.13 to US\$ 5.84, an increase of 45 fold. Other ARV with big price discrepancies were Lamivudine (up to 21 times more expensive) and Stavudine (up to 18 times). Nelfinavir and Didanosine registered the smallest price differences. The PAHO web page on ARV (Spanish:

[http://www.paho.org/spanish/hcp/hca/antiretrovirals\\_HP.htm](http://www.paho.org/spanish/hcp/hca/antiretrovirals_HP.htm); English:

[http://www.paho.org/English/HCP/HCA/antiretrovirals\\_HP.htm](http://www.paho.org/English/HCP/HCA/antiretrovirals_HP.htm)) contains information on other drugs and presentations by country. A comparison of the prices of 7 drugs in different presentations is available at <http://www.paho.org/english/hcp/hca/reunionARVprecios.pps>.

Most prices are from purchases made between the period March through May 2001. The presentation will be regularly updated to capture changes in prices as a result of negotiations between governments and pharmaceutical companies. If more Ministries of Health reply to the PAHO questionnaire, their data will be added to the survey.

### **STI Programs Meet to Discuss New Challenges**

A meeting of heads of STI programs across the region (Lima, 14-18 Sep.) represented an opportunity to share information about the new challenges facing these programs since 1998, when PAHO supported a regional review of the STI national programs. Some of the challenges identified during this meeting are the further implementation of the syndromic approach and the need to improve information systems. In some countries the number of STI cases officially reported is estimated to be 20 times less than the number of patients diagnosed through the syndromic approach. But some countries are developing new and creative ways to report syndromic cases. Meeting participants also discussed training needs and took an international course on STIs, as part of the 40th anniversary celebration of the Universidad Cayetano Heredia. The STI meeting was organized by PAHO, with the collaboration of the university, the Horizontal Technical Cooperation Group (GCTH) and the national AIDS Program of Peru. Agenda details can be found at <http://www.calsnet.com/SIDA>

### **STI-NET Created in Peru**

During the meeting in Lima, heads of STI programs and STI experts approved the creation of the "Network for Action in Sexually Transmitted Infections" (STI-NET). The main focus of the STI-NET will be to support the implementation of STI programs in the region, complementing the work of other networks and institutions. The initial group comprises seven countries, four institutions and several individuals (many Caribbean country representatives could not travel due to the events of September 11 in the US). Fabio Moherdau, epidemiologist of the National AIDS Program of Brazil, was elected network coordinator and will develop a database of persons interested in participating.

### **Recommendations for ARV Therapy Being Finalized**

A draft of a regional protocol for ARV therapy is ready. The AIDS/STI Program is working on the final version. The protocol is the result of the recommendations of experts from 15 countries invited by PAHO (see bulletin number 2). Once ready, it will include recommendations about a) When to start treatment; b) Which drugs to use; c) What should be the initial treatment schedule; d) When the therapy should be changed and which antiretrovirals to use; e) Criteria for follow up to evaluate the failure or success of treatment and f) Mechanisms to promote adherence to treatment.

### **"Promotion of Sexual Health" Now Available in Spanish**

The Spanish version of "Promotion of Sexual Health - recommendations for Action" is now available. This is the result of a consultation convened by PAHO, WHO and the World

Association for Sexology in Antigua, Guatemala, in May 2000. It suggests actions and strategies for the promotion of Sexual Health in the region, including the role of the health sector in the achievement and maintenance of Sexual Health. It also incorporates the many developments that have occurred in the field of human sexuality in the last couple of decades, like concepts of sex, sexuality and sexual health, and definition of sexually healthy behaviors for adults. Copies are being sent to all Spanish speaking PWRs.

### **Central America ARV Debate Gathers Speed**

The access to ARV was discussed in a series of sequential meetings in Central America. A workshop organized by PAHO in Panama indicated that the 8 countries of Central America are planning to treat 10,000 adults and 1,800 children in the next year, asides from 2,500 cases of mother to child transmission. The 30 participants discussed PAHO's draft regional protocol for ARV therapy and how it could be adapted to the subregional reality. They concluded that six ARV drugs would cover 80% of the needs and agreed to prioritize, among others, pregnant women, people living with AIDS and health workers accidentally exposed to the virus. These and other recommendations were discussed in Honduras at the XV meeting of the Central American health ministers (COMISCA) and then at the meeting of the health sector of Central America and the Dominican Republic (RESSCAD). PAHO staff participated in all three meetings.

### **Building Blocks Gets a New Chapter: HIV and TB**

The newest publication of the Building Blocks series, Co-infection TB/HIV in the Americas, was presented and discussed in a regional workshop in San Pedro Sula, Honduras (7-9 Oct). The workshop brought together health care managers from all over the region to discuss several aspects related to comprehensive care for people living with HIV/AIDS.

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The purpose of this bulletin is to share information on the efforts of PAHO professionals involved in the response to AIDS/STI. It is not an official document of the Organization. To add or remove your name from the bulletin's distribution list, contact [sida@paho.org](mailto:sida@paho.org). Use this email address to contribute articles for publication. We ask the PAHO AIDS/STI focal points to send us information on events, strategies, concerns, and needs. PAHO is the regional office of WHO in the Americas and a co-sponsor of UNAIDS.



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