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Editorial - health workers and the fight against discrimination: leaders and actors

When discrimination against people with HIV creeps into health services the consequences can be very serious. Discriminatory health practices include refusing to treat people on the basis of their HIV status, testing for the virus without people's knowledge or permission, and supplying names of people with HIV to others. Sometimes this discrimination is barely noticeable, like when health workers have an uncaring attitude towards people with HIV. This practice is extremely harmful, because fear of mistreatment prevents people from using health services when they most need them. Most health workers do not need any external encouragement to be on the front lines in the fight against discrimination against people with HIV. They do it because of their duty to improve health, their mandate to nurture, and their oath to take the necessary risks to care for fellow human beings. Science has yet to find a cure for AIDS. But there is a cure for discrimination. It can be found in the thousands of health workers in the Americas. (Adapted from an article by Dr. Mirta Roses for World Aids Day 2002. Dr. Roses took office as the new director of PAHO on January 31).

Health workers and the fight against discrimination: the Bolivian example

Between December and February, some 500 physicians, nurses, nursing auxiliaries, and janitorial staff from the largest hospitals in the departments of Santa Cruz, Oruro, and La Paz in Bolivia attended workshops on Human Rights and HIV/AIDS. These workshops, a joint effort by PAHO, the Ministry of Health, UNICEF, and the Bolivian network of people living with HIV (REDBOL+), included basic information on HIV/AIDS (transmission, prevention, epidemiology), as well as presentations on biosafety and human rights, and discussions about discriminatory practices in hospitals and in other contexts.

55% drop in the cost of ARV treatment in Central America

Negotiations between the Central American governments and five pharmaceutical companies have led to a historic reduction in the prices of the antiretroviral drugs used to combat HIV/AIDS. The most common treatment in the subregion (AZT+3TC+EFV) will cost between US\$ 1,035 and US\$ 1,600 per year. This represents an average reduction of 55% over the current prices of brand-name drugs in Central America. The greatest discounts were offered by Glaxo (50% to 83%), Bristol (75%), and Roche (47%, depending on the volume purchased). In addition to cutting prices (33% to 38%), Boehringer will donate drugs for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission. Merck maintained the pricing policy established two years ago, which involves discounts of 75% to 85%. The Panama Negotiation was coordinated by the Secretary of Social Integration of Central America and received technical support from PAHO. The Andean countries will be the next bloc in the Americas to sit down to the negotiating table. For more information, visit <http://www.paho.org/English/DPI/pr030203.htm>.

Central American countries consider purchasing more generic ARV

Central American Ministers of Health met with a representative of Cipla, Ranbaxy and Combinopharma, manufacturers of WHO-certified generic ARV. A number of Central American countries have expressed interest in using more generic ARV, particularly those that have been evaluated against international quality norms, and certified by WHO as suitable for procurement by UN agencies. For those countries in the region selecting this option, the annual price of the first line triple therapy (AZT+3TC+EFV) will be reduced to between US\$ 800 and US\$ 1,200 per patient. These and other generic prices will be considered in conjunction with the reduced prices offered by brand name companies.

Guidelines cover 90% of cases with 7 ARV drugs

One of the current barriers to the use of antiretroviral therapies is the perception that the developing countries must follow the protocols established in the wealthiest countries. This is beyond the means of many Latin American and Caribbean countries. In light of this situation, PAHO has prepared a guide containing recommendations on antiretroviral treatment for adults in the Region. Designed by a group of experts from 15 countries, the Guidelines for Antiretroviral Treatment in Adults for Latin American and Caribbean Countries recommend the use of seven antiretrovirals, which are expected to cover 90% of the cases requiring treatment at an accessible cost. Interested parties can access the document at

http://www.paho.org/English/HCP/HCA/arv_adultos.htm or request copies from sida@paho.org.

LAC ARV price databases to merge

The four different price databases for antiretroviral drugs in Latin America and the Caribbean will merge. The objective is to establish a single, reliable database to assist countries in decision-making for the purchase antiretrovirals. It will also allow public access to information on prices and conditions of procurement. The merger is expected to help standardize the information and increase the commitment of those responsible to provide the data in the countries. At a meeting in Brazil (December 2002) a steering committee was elected, comprising UNAIDS, the Group for Horizontal Technical Cooperation, a representative of civil society, the government of Brazil, and PAHO, which will coordinate the group.

Free Nevirapine extended to all Caribbean

Boeringer-Ingelheim's offer of free Nevirapine for the prevention of mother-to-child-transmission (MTCT) has been extended to all Caribbean countries. PAHO's Caribbean Epidemiology Center (CAREC) has established links between the company and several countries, in addition to the Caribbean Coalition of National AIDS Programs. The Center is also supporting the development of national skills to use the Nevirapine regimen to prevent MTCT. Interested countries should contact CAREC.

LAC gets 8.2% of the Global Fund second round

On the second round of proposals, the Global Fund approved grants of US\$ 2.06 billion over five years to nearly 100 proposals in 60 countries. LAC will receive 8.2% of this, US\$168 million, in the period. This is a decrease in the percentage the region received in the first round, which was 13%. Of the 20 proposals submitted by the region (18 national, 2 subregional), 7 (35%) were successful. One country (Nicaragua) received funding for all 3 diseases, two countries received funding for joint TB and HIV proposals (Peru, El Salvador) and the remainder of funded proposals were for AIDS projects (Costa Rica, Cuba, DOR, Ecuador).

Dr. Alleyne appointed Special HIV/AIDS Envoy to the Caribbean

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has appointed former PAHO Director Sir George Alleyne as his special envoy for HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean. Working closely with Caribbean leaders and UN team coordinators in several Caribbean countries, Dr. Alleyne will be responsible for ensuring follow up to the United Nations General Assembly special session on HIV/AIDS. He will also, on occasion, represent the Secretary-General at events related to HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean region. The Caribbean has the world's second highest HIV infection rate, after Sub-Saharan Africa.

Second generation surveillance gets practical guidelines

Program managers, epidemiologists, social scientists and other experts working to

strengthen HIV surveillance got a new tool to help their work. Initiating Second Generation HIV Surveillance: practical guidelines was published by PAHO/WHO and UNAIDS in English, Spanish and other languages. They are based on the experience gained in the implementation of second generation surveillance between 1999 and 2002 in eight countries in Africa, Asia and LAC. The document focuses on the assessment of HIV, STI and behavioral surveillance and how consensus can be reached to improve surveillance. The electronic version is available at <http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/surveillance/pub19/en> and copies can be ordered from sida@paho.org.

Advocacy kit for gender and HIV launched

A new PAHO paper discusses the effect of female and male gender roles, power relations and sexual behavior on the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Latin American and the Caribbean. Some of the topics covered by The UNGASS, Gender and Women's Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in Latin are violence, commercial sex-work and sex tourism, human trafficking, population displacement and crisis. The document is part of a larger advocacy kit for gender and HIV/AIDS, which includes fact sheets and power point presentations. The paper and the kit can be found at <http://www.paho.org/english/hdp/hdw/advocacykits.htm>.

Youth HIV/AIDS network takes off

A new quarterly publication concerning HIV/AIDS and youth, Youth AIDS Action, is now available. In addition to the newsletter, subscribers will also receive materials by mail, as part of the Youth HIV/AIDS Network developed by PAHO's Adolescent Unit and HIV/AIDS Program, with support from YouthNet and from the Swedish and Norwegian cooperation agencies. To subscribe send name, profession, organization, mailing address and e-mail address to singlets@paho.org.

Nine newspapers publish advocacy news supplement

At least nine daily newspapers from seven countries published the LAC advocacy news supplement for the World AIDS Day 2002. Most of the articles this year highlighted the need to strengthen youth and HIV programs. The themes included testimonies from young people about stigma, stories examining how youth is dealing with conflicting prevention messages (abstinence, fidelity and condom use) and an article on the need to increase the supply of condoms in the region. The articles were independently produced by the news agency Inter Press Service, with PAHO support. The news supplement also contained an editorial about the role of the health sector in combating stigma, by the new PAHO director, Dr. Mirta Roses (see an excerpt at the top of this bulletin). Check at <http://www.ipsnews.net/aids2002/index.shtml>.

Prestigious publication has special edition about LAC

One of the most prestigious publications on its area, AIDS, published by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, dedicated a special supplement (Volume 16, Supplement 3, December 2002) to the impact and response to the epidemic in Latin American and the Caribbean. This supplement of the official journal of the International AIDS Society was edited by Bernhard Schwartländer (WHO) and Roel Coutinho (City Council of Health Services, Amsterdam) and contains 11 articles from 44 contributors familiar with the epidemic in the region, some of them from PAHO. Check at <http://www.aidsonline.com>.


Bookmark PAHO's new HIV/AIDS web page

PAHO has a new web page for HIV/AIDS, which makes it a lot easier to find key documents. Previously, users had to browse through hundreds of documents that mentioned PAHO's response to HIV/AIDS, many of which were not centrally focused on the epidemic. Among the highlights of the new page are the "Building Blocks" series, epidemiological data, prices and guidelines of ARV and a resource page on the Global Fund. Save the address: <http://www.paho.org/english/hcp/hca/aids.htm>.

Phone and email restored

We apologize for any inconvenience caused by the interruption of telephone and email services of the Regional Program on HIV/AIDS-STI during most of December. Those were consequence of unexpected renovation problems. Temporarily, we are back to the OAS building (1889 F St N.W., Washington, DC). Telephone and fax numbers remain the same. Correspondence should always be sent to PAHO's main building (525 23rd Street, Washington, DC 20037-2825).

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. 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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