

• Calendar •

XXXVIIIth Meeting of the Advisory Council on AIDS (ACA)

2:30pm 24 August 2001
(tentative)

VIIIth Meeting of the AIDS Prevention and Care Committee (APCC)

(Date and time to be announced)

XXIIIrd Meeting of the Scientific Committee on AIDS (SCA)

(Date and time to be announced)

Vth Meeting of the Committee on Promoting Acceptance of People Living with HIV/AIDS (CPA)

2:30pm 12 July 2001

In this issue,

- ▶▶ We cover the recent meeting of the Scientific Committee on AIDS (page 24)
- ▶▶ The reply of the Hong Kong Journalists Association on an incident involving a possible case of HIV infection is reprinted (page 25)
- ▶▶ The latest HIV/AIDS situation is summarised (page 26)

Epidemiologist in Hong Kong

PROFESSOR James Chin visited Hong Kong on 24 and 25 May 2001. He was invited to address the Scientific Committee on AIDS at its meeting on 24 May 2001.

At the meeting Professor Chin updated members on the HIV situation in Asia. It was noted that high HIV rates were reported in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and parts of India where there has been significant heterosexual spread. Injection drug use remains one single most important factor behind the rapid spread of HIV in places like certain provinces in China and other South East Asian countries. In places like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Japan, he expressed that MSM (men having sex with sex) has continued to be an important factor behind HIV spread. Professor Chin advised that prevention activities should be targeted in order to achieve the best effect.

Professor Chin is no stranger to Hong Kong. He served as a consultant to the *AIDS Scenario and Surveillance Research Project* initiated by the Scientific Committee on AIDS in 1994. He has recently finished compiling an updated report on the HIV situation in Asia for the World Health Organisation. ⌘

Plan for planning

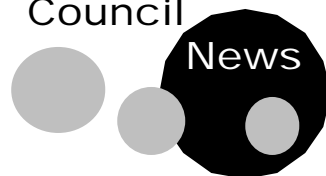
ON 8 May, the Advisory Council on AIDS (ACA) released its proposed plan titled *Enhancing the effectiveness of the community planning process in the Hong Kong context*. As indicated in the accompanying letter, "it is hoped that this proposal can generate discussion and lead to efforts in refining the community planning process in Hong Kong".

Some specific recommendations are made in the paper, with an agenda for action and a proposed model of community planning, focusing on capacity-building, enhancing effectiveness and sustainability of programmes. The document has been distributed to all members of the Council and committees.

The proposal can also be downloaded from ACA's website www.aca-hk.com or the virtual AIDS Office at www.aids.gov.hk ⌘

Council

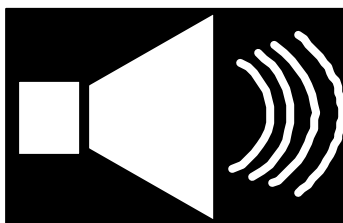
News



HIV in Children

IN the management of paediatric HIV infection, the *Scientific Committee on AIDS* has endorsed the following principles at its 22nd meeting on 24 May 2001:

- (a) HIV-exposed or infected children should be evaluated as soon as possible after birth for the diagnosis of HIV infection.
- (b) Postnatal antiretroviral treatment should be completed according to the perinatal prophylaxis regimen chosen for the mother.
- (c) Prophylaxis against PCP should be commenced at 6 weeks of age for all infants born to an HIV-infected mother.
- (d) Early treatment of HIV-infected infants regardless of clinical and immunologic parameters is the preferred approach for achieving viral suppression.
- (e) Childhood immunization is an important part of the management programme for HIV infected children, the practice of which is similar to that for healthy infants and children with slight adjustment.
- (f) Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) should be considered in the management of HIV-infected children.
- (g) A multispecialty, multidisciplinary approach involving the following expertise is needed for the comprehensive care of HIV-infected children: paediatric infectious disease, paediatric neurology, paediatric cardiology, nursing, social work, psychology, nutrition, and pharmacology. Life-long continuous care is recommended.
- (h) Recommendations for therapy and management will have to be updated frequently as the management of HIV infection in infants, children and adolescents is rapidly evolving and becoming increasingly complex.
- (i) A mechanism shall be in place to enhance the local knowledge base in HIV management in children, and the exposure children (infection or otherwise) to antiretroviral treatment. ⌘



Transfusion Service, and 0.03% in neonates. Members were alerted by the elevation in drug users though the absolute number of infected persons has remained small. In 2000, unlinked anonymous screening of drug users attending methadone clinics yielded a positive result of 0.27%, versus that of less than 0.1% before 1996.

The seroprevalence studies have provided useful information to guide HIV prevention programmes in Hong Kong. The HIV situation in drug users is a matter of concern. In the meantime, the Special Preventive Programme of the Department of Health is working on a consolidated report for publication in the *Hong Kong STD/AIDS Update*. ⌘

Meeting

Notes

Seroprevalences Examined

SEROPREVALENCE studies form an integral part of an effective HIV/AIDS surveillance programme. Seroprevalence studies are conducted to determine the HIV positive rates in different populations. At the recent meeting of the *Scientific Committee on AIDS*, members were updated on the results of seroprevalence studies coordinated by the Special Preventive Programme of the Department of Health.

In communities without apparent risk behaviours, the HIV prevalence has remained low. It was 0.005% in the blood units collected at the Hong Kong Red Cross Blood

HKJA Judgement

On 4 January, the *Committee on promoting Acceptance of People living with HIV/AIDS* (CPA) studied a case involving an actor whose possible HIV status hit the headlines in a few local newspapers. The Committee complained to the Hong Kong Journalists Association in writing (see *ACA Newsfile* February 2001). The following are paragraphs 6 to 12 of the reply dated 10 May 2001:

6. The Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) recognises the question of whether an individual is HIV positive or has AIDS is sensitive, and reporting may involve intrusion into private distress. The articles cited by the Advisory Council on AIDS question whether an actor is HIV positive, and link this to an alleged promiscuous homosexual lifestyle. The allegations are never confirmed in the articles, since the actor refuses to comment.

7. The articles are, to varying degrees, presented in a sensationalist style, aiming at an audience interested in the lifestyles of showbusiness personalities. As such, there is no serious discussion of AIDS issues; rather a simple curiosity in whether the actor in question is indeed HIV positive. As such, the articles fail to show any sympathy

towards an individual's personal circumstances.

8. After careful consideration, the HKJA concludes that the three articles do not follow the guidelines set down in article 6 of the code of ethics on the need not to intrude into private distress. This is especially so as there would appear to be no over-riding considerations of the public interest involved in this case.

9. The HKJA is also of the view that the three articles breach the guidelines set down in article 10, on discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation. The article in the *Oriental Sunday* should be singled out in particular in this respect, given the tone of writing and the way it highlights the possibility that the actor may be homosexual and also be HIV positive.

10. On the question of whether the blood donation service may be put at risk if the individuals use the service to determine whether they are HIV positive, the HKJA would only say that the news stories should avoid advocating any particular course of action. Journalists should focus on facts, and not issue challenges to people. This is permissible only in editorials and op-ed columns.

11. Finally the HKJA would make a general comment about reporting on HIV/AIDS cases. Given the sensitivities involved and the stigma that can be attached to those who are or are suspected to be HIV positive, the media should exercise particular caution and sensitivity in reporting such cases, and only in the rarest cases reveal names. The media should focus on trends, and not individual cases, unless there are over-riding public interest reasons for doing so. These may include the following reasons:

(a) where there is a serious danger to public health;
(b) where a particular illness may jeopardise the ability of a prominent personality to carry out his or her job. This should refer in particular to prominent politicians or business leaders, and should not be used as an excuse to target those in the entertainment business.

12. In presenting stories about HIV/AIDS, the media should not aim at titillating readers, but rather at educating them about the complexities of the problem. Further, the media should base their stories on fact, and not on rumour. ⚡



Surveillance

HIV/AIDS REPORTS

THE Department of Health released its quarterly statistics on HIV/AIDS on 24 May 2001. In the first quarter of the year, 44 HIV infections and 9 AIDS cases were reported, bringing the cumulative total to 1586 and 509 respectively.

While sexual transmission remained the commonest mode of HIV infection, six drug users were diagnosed with the infection, bringing the total number to 39. The most common primary AIDS defining illness was *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia.

The Department of Health has been collecting HIV/AIDS reports from physicians and laboratories on a regular and voluntary basis for over 15 years. A public announcement is made now every quarter. Details of the reports and analysis would appear in the next issue of *Hong Kong STD/AIDS Update*, which is accessible through the Virtual AIDS Office at www.aids.gov.hk ♂

Perinatal Infection Reported

THE first quarter of the year 2001 noted the report of another case of HIV infection contracted through mother-to-child transmission.

To date a total of 13 cases of mother-to-child HIV infections have been reported in Hong Kong. Five of the babies have already progressed to AIDS. About half (6) were diagnosed after delivery. Though perinatal infection is not a very common phenomenon, the devastation on the family is remarkable.

It was reported in the press that the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority would be implementing universal

Reported HIV/AIDS Statistics updated 31 March 2001

		HIV (AIDS)	
Gender	male	1306	(449)
	female	280	(60)
Ethnicity	Chinese	1096	(393)
	non-Chinese	490	(116)
Transmission	heterosexual	898	(328)
	homosexual	304	(92)
	bisexual	79	(27)
	injecting drug use	39	(9)
	blood/bl products	68	(19)
	perinatal	13	(5)
	undetermined	185	(29)
TOTAL		1586	(509)

antenatal HIV testing later this year, in line with the recommendations made by the *Advisory Council on AIDS* in late 2000. The new strategy would minimise the occurrence of paediatric HIV infection. It is estimated that between 15 to 30 mothers would be diagnosed with the infection yearly, giving birth to 3 to 6 infected babies. Through universal screening and prompt intervention, the number of HIV infected babies would become less than 1-2 per year. ♂

