

POST

THE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT

Price of Newspapers

Friday, February 23, 2007 / Safar 5, 1428

Published from

HIV/AIDS cases increasing in Pakistan

WASIM IQBAL

BHURBAN: Pakistan is currently classified in the 'concentrated epidemic' phase by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the UNAIDS definitions as more than 5 percent of HIV prevalence in concentrated group like injecting drug use.

The country is on a high-risk for a further spread of HIV infection into the general population. This has been the crux of the participants at a media workshop jointly organised by the European Commission, Pakistan National AIDS Consortium and Mercy Corps at a local hotel. The topic of workshop was to share information regarding HIV/AIDS and opportunist disease tuberculosis.

The participants agreed on the spread of HIV/AIDS is due to low literacy rate, high prevalence of sexually transmitted infec-

tions, high number of commercial sex workers both female and male, unsafe blood transfusions and increasing number of injecting drug users.

In his inaugural speech, representative of the PNAC Aftab Ahmed stressed the media persons to contribute their role for changing opinion and mind of the people prevailing in society about the HIV/AIDS patient. It was much larger than a simple medical condition. This issue should be dealt in context of a social, cultural and religious matter. Media could help to change social behaviour towards AIDS patient through awareness.

Talking about facts, realities and myths of the disease, he said it was a taboo in society. There could be various sources through which virus could be transmitted in a body. Apart from extra marital relationship between men to women and men to,

it could also be transmitted through reuse of syringe, blood banks etc.

Elisabeth Locker from European Commission in her briefing about the overall framework for the implementation of the European Commission's external assistance said the EC was one of the biggest grant donors to Pakistan. Total EC contribution in country from 2000 to 2006 was 333 Euro million excluding humanitarian aid.

NWFP PNAC National Manager Khizar Hayat revealed some glaring figure of HIV/AIDS patients in Pakistan. He said the number of cases of HIV infection continue to rise. At present, he said 3,224 cumulative cases of HIV and 367 AIDS cases had been reported to the National AIDS Control Programme.

The actual number was believed to be as high as 85,000 as per the WHO and

UNAIDS estimated.

He emphasised the people must take it a disease not a curse. He also criticised the federal government for not releasing adequate funds for the prevention and treatment of the affected person. "Each province has been supplied with ART (medicine for treatment of HIV/AIDS) only for the treatment of 30 patients though the number is much higher," he said.

The high risk vulnerable included drug addicted, sex workers and their close relative as it was a transmitted disease. He blamed the Muttrahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) for not giving much emphasis to prevalence and treatment of such diseases. PNAC representative Raja Khalid Mahmood said it was a stigma that it only transmitted through sex. It was a misconception and one could conceive virus accidentally.

Many studies were carried out on different levels. According to a study, the drug addicts who injects drug and shares syringes 35 to 40 percent affected with HIV virus. Similarly, the ratio in Faisalabad was 15 percent and 12 percent in Sargodha and 15 percent of these addicts were married and most possibility their wives also conceived the virus and their children carry it further, he said.

National Laboratories Network Tuberculosis In-charge Sabra Tahseen said in Pakistan each year 250,000 new cases of tuberculosis were registered.

The age group which was mostly affected by this disease was 15-59 years. While, Arif Noor from Mercy Corps was of the opinion Pakistan was on number 7 in the world having carrying the burden of tuberculosis and each year 300,000 new patients conceiving the infection.