

Q: Are HIV and STI services integrated in China?

A: The link between HIV care and detection services for other STIs in China is weak. Syphilis testing is included in some HIV voluntary counselling and testing programmes, but that is the extent of the connection in many places. No other STIs are included. Some maternal and child health-care centres are planning to integrate syphilis into their treatment packages, but lack the funding to do so. Syphilis screening and detection services are integrated into some HIV prevention and control programmes, mainly implemented by the China CDC's programmes for high-risk groups. But this only helps us to understand the spread of the disease, since little care for syphilis is provided following the testing.

Q: Do many people in China have both HIV and other STIs?

A: There are no national statistics on this because the HIV reporting system and that of other STIs are separate. But it appears that HIV combined with other STIs, especially syphilis, is on the rise in high-risk groups. One reason is that HIV and other STIs can be sexually transmitted, while HIV and other STIs encourage each other's spread. For example, someone with HIV and an ulcerative STI – such as syphilis, genital herpes or chancroid – can transmit HIV more easily. It is also more difficult to treat the STIs con-

tracted by people infected with HIV. Indeed, this combination can accelerate the spread of both HIV and other STIs, and worsens both epidemics. Moreover, in some areas many female sex workers are also drug users and are at high risk of contracting HIV and other STIs. We need to reinforce the control of other STIs, which are mostly curable, to help prevent and detect HIV.

Q: What programmes are in place to raise awareness of HIV and STI prevention?

A: A public awareness campaign has been conducted across China to educate people about safe sex and HIV/AIDS, particularly over the past decade. This involved public interest television spots, theatrical performances, posters in public places and school education in safe sex, etc. Education programmes that focus on high-risk groups are also a major part of national HIV prevention campaigns. There are prevention programmes that reach out to migrant workers, in the workplace and at the entertainment parlours where they are the patrons. Also, promotion of condom use among high-risk groups allows us to kill two birds with one stone, with regard to preventing sexually transmitted HIV and other STIs.

Q: What are the challenges in effective prevention, care and treatment for STIs and/or HIV?

A: There are many challenges. First, these epidemics are on the rise in

China, but the policies for STI prevention, care and treatment are still being developed. Second, although the central government has called for cooperation between relevant departments, conflicts of interest between departments, such as those responsible for public health and public security, may think differently about the services needed to reach drug users and sex workers. Third, the public health system is divided on how best to tackle disease control and prevention. From the disease control perspective, we believe that detection and treatment of STIs should be decentralized, but hospital administrations push for resources for STIs to be centralized and concentrated in their hospitals. Public awareness campaigns about STIs are not given as high a priority as they should. Unlike many Western countries, China does not have an STI public health programme – which it should have. Fourth, state policy has focused mainly on HIV/AIDS. Little attention has been paid to other STIs and their STI testing and treatment are regarded by health service providers as a source of profits. It is essential to have public policies that prioritize prevention, intervention and treatment of STIs to improve the cooperation between different departments and within the public health system, and to allocate resources for STI issues, rather than commercializing these services. ■

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- Global campaigns to fight **diarrhoea** – the second-deadliest illness for children – must be re-energized to prevent the deaths of millions in the developing world, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) said on 14 October as they released a new report on the disease. Read the report here: http://www.who.int/child_adolescent_health/documents/9789241598415/en/index.html
- More than 4 million people in low- and middle-income countries were receiving **antiretroviral therapy** at the end of 2008. This represents a 36% increase in one year and a ten-fold increase over five years, according to a new report released on 30 September by WHO, UNICEF and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Read the report here: <http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/2009progressreport/en/index.html>

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