

Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS

The situation analysis exposed growing community concern about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS at a community level. The widespread occurrence of STDs, the stigma associated with having an STD and the unavailability of services resulting in delays in treatment also contribute to the spread of HIV infection.

With close to 400 people a day being infected with HIV virus in South Africa and a doubling time of 8.5 months, AIDS will emerge as our country's biggest health problem. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is still largely unseen at a community level - as is any concerted government effort to combat this disease.

The spread of STDs is aggravated by:

- social and economic circumstances which promote their spread - migrancy, homelessness, poverty, poor education and unemployment;
- a rigid educational system which, due to a misdirected moralism, has refused to develop an appropriate sexuality and life-skills programme;
- a racist family planning programme that has politicised all methods of contraception, including condoms; and
- a totally inadequate primary health care health service with a "hit and miss" approach to the treatment of STDs.

Specifically with regard to HIV/AIDS, the following problems were identified:

- an uncaring government which ignored the emerging pandemic because it was spreading in the marginalised communities of blacks, women and gays;
- no home based care support for persons with HIV/AIDS and their families;
- a lack of anti discrimination legislation to protect people with AIDS/HIV regarding employment, insurance, access to medication and housing; and
- gross disregard for patient rights with respect to testing and breach of confidentiality of HIV status.

This has resulted in non-government organisations (NGOs) and community based organisation (CBOs) having to develop effective intervention strategies without government support.

This conference makes the following proposals:

We call on health workers to:

- integrate the prevention and treatment of AIDS into comprehensive PHC services and not to deal with AIDS in isolation;
- practise universal infection control measures without special procedures for persons with HIV; and
- stop the indiscriminate testing of patients without informed consent and without any pre or post test counselling.

We call on government to:

- endorse the AIDS charter;
- introduce anti-discriminatory legislation to protect people with HIV/AIDS during the next session of parliament;
- introduce sexuality education into all teacher training colleges and also for existing teachers by the end of 1993;
- in consultation with parents, CBOs and NGOs, to introduce a life skills programme for all school children over 8 years of age which includes an appropriate sexuality programme;
- introduce comprehensive education on STDs, HIV/AIDS, sexuality and counselling to all categories of health workers in training;
- develop an effective mass media campaign together with non-government and community based organisations;
- immediately remove the 15% import surcharge on condoms;
- make high quality condoms available and accessible through credible organisations free of charge;
- integrate treatment programmes for sexually transmitted diseases into comprehensive PHC services in order to remove the stigma of attending such services, and to improve the counselling skills of all who work in such services. Such services should be free and confidential; and
- improve the PHC services so as to effectively support and care for people with HIV/AIDS.

The AIDS charter, launched on December 1 1992, was formulated by over 40 organisations working in the field of HIV/AIDS. It documents the rights and responsibilities of people with HIV and AIDS.

