

ERITREA

DHAPP

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE HIV/AIDS
PREVENTION PROGRAM

REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF HIV/AIDS
AMONG UNIFORMED PERSONNEL IN
SELECTED AFRICAN NATIONS AND BEYOND

WINNING BATTLES IN THE WAR AGAINST HIV/AIDS

BACKGROUND

Country Statistics

The population of Eritrea is estimated to be 4.78 million people, with an average life expectancy of 59.1 years. Several languages are spoken in Eritrea including Afar and Arabic, with an estimated literacy rate of 58.6%, unevenly distributed between men and women. Since independence from Ethiopia in 1993, Eritrea has faced the economic problems of a small, desperately poor country. Like the economies of many African nations, the economy is largely based on subsistence agriculture, with 80% of the population involved in farming and herding. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$1,000, with 50% of Eritreans living below the poverty line.

HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in Eritrea's general population is estimated at 2.4%. Eritrea has approximately 59,000 individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Identified significant risk factors include blood transfusions and unprotected sexual contact. Most cases of HIV in Eritrea are spread through heterosexual sex. Unmarried women aged 15-24 years are a vulnerable group in this population, with prevalence rates three times that of the general population.

Military Statistics

The Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) is estimated at approximately 200,000. Eritrea allocates 17.7% of the GDP for military purposes. A two-and-a-half-year border war with Ethiopia that erupted in 1998 ended under UN auspices in December 2000. Eritrea currently hosts a UN peacekeeping operation that is monitoring a 25 km-wide Temporary Security Zone on the border with Ethiopia.

PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

In April 2006, DHAPP staff provided peer education training on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection prevention for health workers at a military hospital in Eritrea in order to increase awareness and change behavior on a grass-roots level. Topics of the training included universal precautions to prevent transmission of HIV to health workers, treatment of patients, and how and why to use antiretroviral therapy. Thirty (30) workers were trained.



Foreign Military Financing Assistance

Eritrea was awarded Foreign Military Financing funding for the acquisition of laboratory and medical equipment. This award was allocated for fiscal years 2003 and 2004, and 2003 funding was released for expenditure during the FY05. These funds have been used to procure a chemistry analyzer, centrifuge, and water bath, in addition to other supporting diagnostic supplies and reagents.



Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received a proposal from the EDF for activities in 2007. The primary objectives were to scale up a “*Seeing Is Believing*” campaign to all soldiers and new recruits, using EDF HIV-positive members; continue the ongoing care and support program for tuberculosis (TB) and opportunistic infections (OIs) prophylaxis; develop and distribute new Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials; refurbish and equip 5 counseling and testing (CT) centers; conduct biannual HIV testing for all personnel; provide reagents and test kits for CT centers and laboratories; provide postexposure prophylaxis training for medical personnel; and monitor and evaluate impact.

The proposal was reviewed by a scientific panel and will be presented to the DHAPP Board of Directors.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Prevention

During the fiscal year, 240 EDF troops were reached with comprehensive prevention messages, and another 210 were trained in blood safety. Twenty-five military medical providers were trained in the provision of prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

In September 2006, 26,000 brochures were produced and handed over to EDF health officers. This effort is a continuation of the production of IEC materials. Previously, pocket-sized calendars were produced and distributed to EDF personnel, with a primary goal to teach and encourage behavior change about HIV/AIDS in military personnel.

The EDF brochures focus on CT, including messages explaining the components of CT and its importance and advantages.

Care and Treatment

The EDF supports three laboratories that have the capability to perform HIV tests and CD4 and/or lymphocyte testing. TB prophylaxis is now provided to all HIV-positive troops who are negative for TB. Bactrim is used when indicated to protect against OIs. Antiretroviral therapy has recently been introduced as an option for active-duty troops.

Other

As part of a prevention package, 240 EDF troops were trained on the reduction of HIV-related stigma and discrimination.