



RWANDA

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

Rwanda is a poor rural country with about 90% of the population engaged in (mainly subsistence) agriculture. It is the most densely populated country in Africa and is landlocked, with few natural resources and minimal industry. Primary foreign exchange earners are coffee and tea. The estimated population of Rwanda is 10 million people, with an average life expectancy of 49 years. Kinyarwanda is the official language of Rwanda, which has an estimated literacy rate of 70%, evenly distributed between men and women. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$1,000, with 60% of Rwandans living below the poverty level.

HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in Rwanda's general population is estimated at 3.1%, a decline from recent years. Rwanda has approximately 190,000 individuals living with HIV/AIDS. The primary identified risk factor in the population is unprotected heterosexual contact.

Military Statistics

The Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF) is estimated at approximately 30,000. Rwanda expends 2.9% of the GDP on military expenditures. No current prevalence data is available for the RDF, but a seroprevalence study and behavioral survey is planned for FY08.

PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

The RDF HIV/AIDS program is a collaborative effort between the RDF, the Office of the Defense Attaché at the US Embassy, Population Services International (PSI), Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science Center for AIDS Research, Education and Services (Drew CARES), and DHAPP. Working in the Office of the Defense Attaché at the US Embassy, an in-country program manager coordinates activities between the implementing partners and the RDF. DHAPP staff members provided technical assistance to the RDF during in-country visits throughout FY07. The purpose of the trips included review, assistance, and preparation of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Rwanda country operational plan (COP) for FY08, as well as military-specific planning and technical assistance to the RDF and US Embassy personnel. DHAPP staff members represent the RDF as members of the PEPFAR Rwanda Core Team, and have been involved in every level of country planning, ensuring that RDF programs are adequately addressed.



OUTCOMES & IMPACTS

Prevention

During FY07, PSI's military behavior change communication (BCC) program continued trainings, peer education activities, and supporting Anti-AIDS clubs. Key focuses of this year's BCC activities was the support and strengthening of Anti-AIDS clubs. In FY07, a total of 27 clubs were established and were receiving ongoing supervision from PSI in organizing activities among soldiers.

During the year, 16,337 RDF troops and family members were reached with abstinence and being faithful prevention messages and 80 peer educators were

trained. PSI promotes abstinence and being faithful messages to married soldiers through inter-personal communication activities and peer education sessions. These messages also target young soldiers who are not yet sexually active, and married soldiers who live away from their spouses. In addition, 29,552 troops and family members were reached through comprehensive prevention messages that go beyond abstinence and being faithful, and 205 peer educators were trained. In total, 46,425 troops and family members were reached with prevention messages and 285 peer educators were trained in FY07.

The knowledge of transmission prevention has empowered HIV-positive soldiers in the RDF to spread the word to others. One group of HIV-positive soldiers created their own music group and they travel throughout their community, openly sharing their HIV status and encouraging others to protect themselves from possible infection.



Two (2) prevention of mother-to-child transmission outlets provided services to 613 pregnant women, including counseling and testing (CT). Thirty-eight (38) women received a complete course of antiretroviral prophylaxis.

Care

Two (2) service outlets provided HIV-related palliative care to military members and their families. During the year, 1,798 RDF members were provided with HIV-related palliative care (1,534 men, 264 women), and another 78 individuals were trained in the provision of that care. Drew CARES provided a mobile treatment and care unit (MTCU) for the RDF and it has helped soldiers cope with their HIV status and disclosure to their partners. RDF nurses noted clear differences between soldiers who received care through the MTCU and soldiers

who received care elsewhere. Those who were served by the MTCU had an opportunity to talk openly about their feelings and troubles and were much more willing to disclose their HIV status to their partners.

Three (3) CT Centers provided HIV testing for RDF personnel, again monitored as part of the larger PSI program. During FY07, 13,003 individuals were tested for HIV and received their results, including RDF members and their dependents. Ten (10) individuals received CT training, including RDF personnel. Through PSI's military mobile voluntary CT program 7,034 soldiers were counseled and tested (a subset of the total 13,003 tested). All HIV-positive clients were referred to surrounding public clinics or Kanombe Military Hospital in Kigali through the Medical Brigade Doctors for follow-on services. Clients were also referred to the MTCU that Drew CARES launched recently.

Treatment

Drew CARES acted as the implementing agent on behalf of the RDF for antiretroviral therapy (ART). During FY07, 2 outlets provided ART services to RDF personnel and their families. One hundred eighty-one (181) service members or dependents were newly started on ART during the reporting period, and 1,259 military members or families were receiving ART by the end of the reporting period (976 men, 241 women, 22 boys, 20 girls). Seventy-eight (78) military health workers were trained in the provision of ART. One (1) laboratory has the capacity to perform CD4 tests, and 8 individuals were trained in the provision of laboratory services.

Proposed Future Activities

In addition to the ongoing successful efforts of in-country PEPFAR partner PSI in RDF prevention program implementation, DHAPP collaborated with Drew CARES to expand their work in Rwanda. Drew CARES is working with the RDF in HIV-related palliative care and treatment services, as well as CT services for the RDF. PSI and Drew CARES, on behalf of the RDF, submitted proposals for continuation of their programs to the Rwanda Country Team, which were included in the FY08 COP.