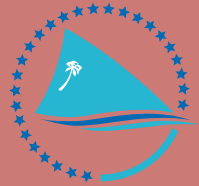




Pacific AIDS Alert



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MICRONESIA: **STEPS IN THE
RIGHT DIRECTION**

'Night and Day'

Unique collaboration with sex workers in New Caledonia



Pacific AIDS hero
honoured by United Nations

In memorium:

Robert (Kinou) Tematafaarere

FROM THE PASA DESK

This issue has no particular theme. It includes news of AIDS awareness activities at the Pacific Islands Festival of the Arts, and two articles outlining how small grants from SPC AIDS Project have been used, in the Federated States of Micronesia and New Caledonia.

In October this year, a remarkable young woman, Maire Bopp Dupont of French Polynesia, received the UNDP Race against Poverty award from United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. She is the first person from the Pacific Islands to win this award. Maire continues with her AIDS prevention advocacy work (see story pages 4-5).

As we go to press, the AIDS Project has come to the end of its current three year cycle of AusAID funding. A prefeasibility and project identification study was undertaken in August 2000 to review progress under the AusAID-funded HIV/AIDS Pacific Regional Initiative. This review was carried out by Gary Wiseman (UNDP Suva), Steven Vete (UNAIDS Suva) and Judy Rudland, a consultant from Australia. Watch this page for future developments. Our project Coordinator, Judith Taylor, has resigned for health reasons and returned to Australia. Judith

was a delight to work with. We wish her well in whatever she does next. Andrew Peteru, Training officer, and Patricia Sheehan, documentalist, remain until the end of January 2001, and we have a temporary assistant, Catherine Sipa, from the island of Maré, New Caledonia.

We thank those of you who found time to contribute news and articles for this issue. As we have no one who can work full time on Pacific AIDS alert, we depend on you for help. Please keep sending us articles, news, photos, and especially opinions.

Best wishes for the New Year 2001 from the SPC HIV/AIDS & STD Project team. ●

Cover photo: UNDP honoured four activists in the global fight against AIDS at a special Race against Poverty awards ceremony on 23 October in New York. Pictured are Maire Bopp Dupont, a journalist from French Polynesia; Rita Arauz Molina, a psychologist from Nicaragua; Father Arkadiusz Nowak, a priest from Poland; and Catherine Phiri, an HIV/AIDS activist from Malawi (see story p5)

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MEMORIUM

In memorium: Robert (Kinou) Tematafaarere

Sad news from Noumea. Robert TeMata, whom some of you will remember from the first Pacific AIDS conference in Nadi, or as a personal friend, died on 3 December 2000. He was just 31 years old. He had been suffering from what he thought was a bad flu and had been reluctant to go to the doctor. He died very suddenly, of leptospirosis.



Robert had graphic arts diplomas from New Caledonia, Australia and Papua New Guinea. From an early age he was also committed to grassroots community development, on which he was guided by the teachings of Paolo Freire. He combined his graphic arts and community training skills in his work for NGOs in New Caledonia, PNG, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Robert designed the cover for the regional AIDS strategy, and the SPC AIDS Project's logo. He was instrumental in developing a beautiful set of AIDS posters and leaflets for his own NGO, ADSPPK (Kanak health association), two years ago. More recently, he did the illustrations for SPC's AIDS home care booklet. He was also a talented artist in his own right. Robert was a priceless asset to his country,

and to the Pacific, being highly motivated and entirely selfless. His linguistic skills (he was fluent in all 3 Melanesian pidgins, plus English and French) allowed him to develop an extensive network in the Pacific, particularly in Melanesia. He had just come back from PNG, where he helped the Melanesian Trust with grassroot community trainings on the border with Irian Jaya.

SPC financed Robert's attendance at the HIV and seafarer's project peer education train the trainers workshop, Samoa, in August 2000, in order to further develop his skills with a view to having him help facilitate other trainings in the region, and of course to help him in his work in New Caledonia. Robert impressed both trainers and fellow participants alike. Komera of the Kiribati Red Cross had this to say "I have learnt to know him as a friend and someone you could ask for assistance and who was always willing to help. For the short time I knew him, I will always treasure those moments". At his own expense, Robert spent time in Suva, Fiji, afterwards to work with AIDS Task Force of Fiji, who had conducted the peer education training. Robert was one of the few people in New Caledonia doing AIDS prevention work in marginalised communities such as squatter settlements, and with casual sex workers.



Robert Temata, with colleague Mado Ayawa, at the peer education training of trainers workshop, Samoa, August 2000.

It is hard to do justice to Robert in words, but he made a lasting impression on all who met him. He was an intelligent, kind and caring young man, with a wonderful sense of humour. We miss his visits to the office terribly. Messages of condolence can be sent to his parents, Mr & Mrs Louis Tematafaarere, 15 rue Nautilus, Normandie, Noumea, New Caledonia. ●

'Robert was a priceless asset to his country, and to the Pacific, being highly motivated and entirely selfless.'

MAIRE BOPP DUPONT : Breaking the Silence on HIV/AIDS

Maire Bopp Dupont of French Polynesia has been a tireless advocate on HIV-related issues since going public about her HIV-positive status at the Pacific Island News Association (PINA) conference in Tahiti in December 1998. She has since spoken at the 1st Pacific Regional Conference on HIV/AIDS and STD, Nadi, February 1999, and has talked with a variety of groups in Fiji,

French Polynesia, Cook Islands, and Papua New Guinea. Maire has received several awards for her work, including the University of the South Pacific School of Journalism's Storyboard Award, and PINA's Pacific Media Freedom

Award. In October 2000 she travelled to New York with her father to receive UNDP's Race Against Poverty Award from United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (see story and photos page 5).

Maire travelled to Wallis and Futuna in December at their invitation, to help with World AIDS week activities. She spoke to the King of Wallis and the two kings of Futuna, and also spoke in schools and on television. During a stopover in Noumea she kindly agreed to appear on the daily television programme 'Calétonic', which has a huge audience, being broadcast during the lunch hour. She thus became the first HIV-positive person to appear on television in New Caledonia without their face and voice disguised.

Maire's ease with the media and public speaking, due both to her training (she is a journalist), and to her years of activism on political, environmental, and social justice issues, make her an ideal advocate on HIV/AIDS issues. As President of the AIDS support organisa-

tion Agir contre le SIDA (Act against AIDS), Maire advocates for proper sex education in schools. "For me, health has to include sexual life. Learning about how our bodies work helps establish a respect for our bodies, and other people's. This is an education we should receive from an early age, with lessons adapted to our age, so that we will be prepared, will know how life begins and how to avoid certain things. I am trying to convince our Minister of Education to put a health curriculum in schools, including sex education".

In October 1999, 'Maire' a film made by SPC's Regional Media Centre in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific (USP) was launched. Maire sums up the film thus: "It was made at the initiative of my journalism professor at USP. It's a 40-minute documentary. It is a window on my life as an HIV-positive person today. It's about how my family and friends reacted, what I'm doing, a sort of mixture of interview and real life, it isn't remixed, it isn't cinema, it's an example of a person with HIV continuing to live as well as possible without putting others at risk and trying to live a normal life with a family, a job, etc."

The video Maire is available free from SPC's AIDS Project, Noumea, or from UNAIDS Suva (c/- UNDP, Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji).



Maire Bopp Dupont and her father Jacky

Pacific AIDS hero and role model honoured by United Nations

At a stirring ceremony bringing together grassroots activists, music superstars, UNDP Goodwill Ambassadors and international leaders, UNDP honored four activists in the global battle against HIV/AIDS at the Fourth Annual Race Against Poverty Awards Ceremony at the United Nations General Assembly Hall in New York, 23 October 2000. The event, marking the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty with the theme "Breaking the Silence on HIV/AIDS," underscored the close links between the devastating impact of the disease and the scourge of extreme poverty.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan presented the awards to **Maire Bopp Dupont**, a journalist from French Polynesia; Rita Arauz Molina, a psychologist from Nicaragua; Father Arkadiusz Nowak, a priest from Poland; and Catherine Phiri, an HIV/AIDS activist from Malawi. Also recognized for their contributions to the fight against HIV/AIDS were Dr. Jean William Papp of Haiti, Mercy Makhamele of South Africa, and Phill Wilson of the US.

Sharing their passion and musical talents in honoring the awardees and breaking the silence on HIV/AIDS were the Soweto String Quartet, Angelique Kidjo, Youssou N'Dour, and Mary J. Blige.

"We want to make every man, woman and child understand that facing up to HIV/AIDS is a point of honour, not a source of shame," said Mr. Annan. "To show us the way, we need heroes and role models. We need people like the individuals from four different continents whom we honor today." "I am truly delighted that UNAIDS has been able to work with each of these award winners," said Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS. "They have worked in diverse regions with very different problems, but they have taught the same lessons: speaking out can make a difference, people with AIDS are not the problem but

part of the solution, and dignity is the foundation for action."

"While I am grateful for the recognition of the work I have been doing, the award won't mean anything unless I can use it to help improve the situation in the Pacific" said Maire on being asked what winning the UNDP award meant to her. ●

Los Angeles Times, 24 October 2000



Maire Bopp Dupont of French Polynesia receives the Race against Poverty award from H.E. Kofi A. Annan, UN Secretary-General, on 23 October 2000, at the United Nations Assembly Hall in New York

"We, sex workers, AIDS prevention workers"

One of the most impressive speakers at the 1st New Caledonia colloquium on AIDS, April 2000, was Antoine, a representative of local sex workers. His eloquent presentation was very revealing, both of the contradictions in our societies, and of the role of professional sex workers as AIDS prevention agents, and not agents of transmission of the disease. We reprint his speech here.

"At the beginning of the epidemic, we transgender were pointed at and accused, like the homosexual community, of being responsible for spreading this disease. This was all the more difficult given that society already placed us at the bottom the ladder. A scapegoat was needed. We were it. But we wanted to be allowed to live our lives, to be respected in our choice of life style, and to be accepted as responsible adult citizens.

Fortunately, at this time, the media and doctors did a lot for us and today mentalities seem to have changed a bit.

Of course, we were afraid of AIDS. First because we were professionally much more exposed to the risk, and also because some of us had friends with HIV/AIDS.

Thus the condom became automatic. We had to protect ourselves, to think of ourselves first.

However, even though we were conscious of the risks, very clear on prevention messages, we still had to get our clients to accept condoms, which was not always easy.

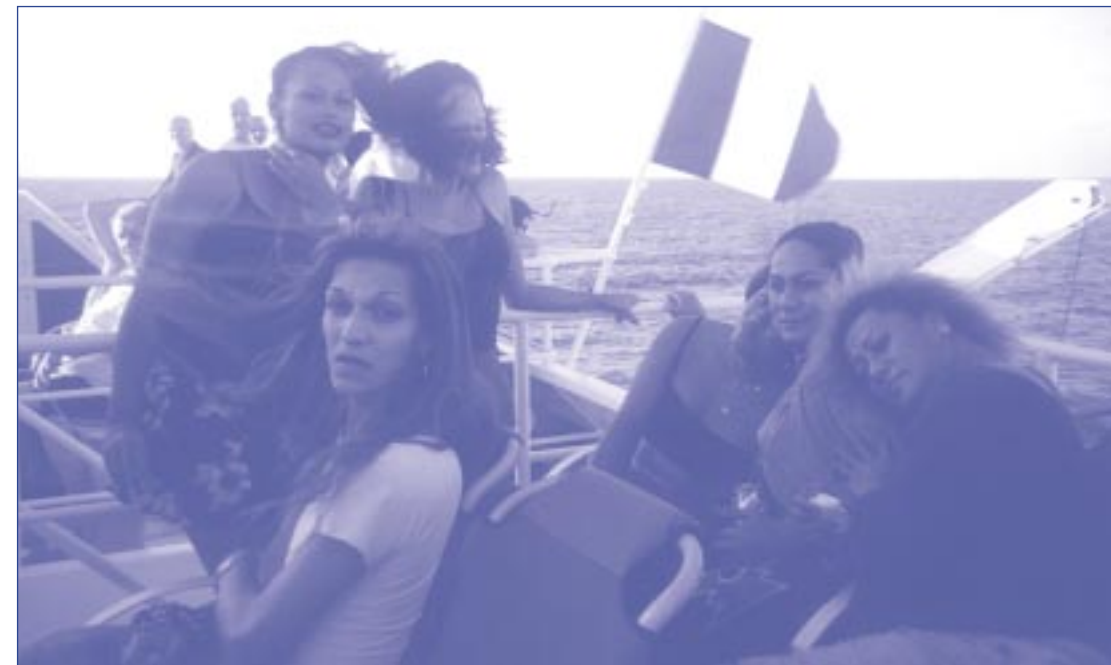
You should realise that too many still ask for penetration without a condom (as many as half our clients) .. and that doesn't include blowjobs (80% of clients don't want to use condoms).

So, every time, we still have to negotiate. Over the years we've become very adept at this, specialists in fact. We have to convince difficult clients, and even to turn down those who look like they might become violent, or uncontrollable. Men over 40 years of age are particularly hard to convince of the need for a condom.

Try to imagine that in a difficult context, in precarious conditions (from a hygiene perspective too: no running water, no rubbish bins), the risk of force, rising economic pressures, harrassment by certain authorities, voyeurism, and the families coming to see the 'zoo animals', the risk of being pushed further out of town, lack of security, etc.

And it could be so tempting to accept three or four times the normal price for unprotected sex ... And; they are married ... they're clean ... they feel nothing with a condom on ... they aren't sick... they're military or ... doctors ... or, so they say.

So, we have had to become strong, very strong. And it isn't easy when society continues to judge us, to marginalise us, or worse, to pretend we don't exist. But our professional activity is neither clandestine, or illegal. And then, would we do this work if there was no demand for it?



We also have an educational role in relation to our young clients. Many are not bothered, for them the disease doesn't exist. We have to explain the risks to them, to show them a condom isn't so terrible. Fortunately they at least are easy to convince.

We also have to warn the new girls on the block that, no matter what the client looks like, they must not take risks, the use of condoms must become systematic.

It is much more difficult for us to reach the increasing number of casual sex workers, who take many more risks and also lower prices... Today our community must protect itself, take charge of itself, let the legitimacy of its views be known, organise itself as responsible adults, and take a holistic approach to its health.

The Multipurpose Medical Centre also meets with us each week, one of us goes and gets a box of condoms and can provide the other girls with them as needed. We certainly can't count on clients to carry them, nor that they will ask to use one.

It even so happens that we give condoms to people who aren't clients but who come and

ask for them in the evening because they know we have them.

We are not at odds with society. With a lifestyle that is our own, minority perhaps, but respectable, we have the same problems as everyone ... economic ... housing ... health, the same rights and duties as other citizens. We are professional and responsible. So why are we rejected?

This Colloquium will have been the opportunity to make ourselves better known, to change the ideas society has about us a little; perhaps the beginning of a recognition we have a right to, as any human being.

It is a very important step in reducing the discrimination we are faced with daily and especially to make you aware that we, sex workers, exist, and are frontline prevention agents in the fight against the epidemic in New Caledonia".

Translation by P. Sheehan

"We had to protect ourselves, to think of ourselves first."



Health educator Didier Delfolie with participants at the Isle of Pines workshop for Noumea's sex workers (see story page 8).

'Night and Day'

Unique collaboration with sex workers in New Caledonia

by Patricia Sheehan

'Queer!' 'Poofter!' 'Whore!' These are just some of the nicer names Noumea's transgender sex workers are subjected to daily. When they were made to shift out of town by the local police several years ago, health workers became alarmed, as it made it much harder to identify and work with them. For the last five years, the Southern Province Health Department's Multipurpose Medical Centre (CMP) has been supporting the mainly transgender sex workers, most of whom now work in the port area. At first the support consisted of providing information, condoms and lube, but later broadened to include psychological and social support. Over the years the CMP has built up a relationship of trust and mutual respect with the sex workers. We report on some of the outcomes of this project.

Under a one year project, psychologist Didier Delfolie was bought on board to help street educator Thierry Lefèvre to develop a strategy and carry out specific activities to improve the lot of sex workers, who were subject to increasing pressure from authorities and aggression from clients. They decided to take a more global health approach, to include the social sphere, and help combat discrimination, using the WHO definition of a human being as a biological, psychological and social being.

Often rejected by their families, in a situation of economic survival, pushed to the outer limits of town, barely tolerated, they were considered as at the extreme limits of social existence, only recognised as sexual commodities. These repeated demeaning images, for many against a background of sexual identity crisis, meant they had little self-esteem, putting them in a position of inferiority in negotiations with clients, and making them neglect their health.

Helping the sex workers fight discrimination and regain a legitimate place in society became a priority of the project. The first idea Didier and Thierry came up with was a training workshop for sex workers, to be held in the local tourist paradise, the Isle of Pines. The theory was that holding the workshop in a hotel in such a location allowed the workers to remove themselves from their work environment, and show them that they too had the



right to stay in a nice hotel and be treated to respect. SPC's AIDS project was approached for a small grant and was happy to oblige for such an innovative proposal, which included six months of followup to the workshop.

Eleven people participated in the workshop. Everyone turned up on time for the flight, which was for many their first. Some of their fellow passengers were curious but there were no negative reactions. As the hotel bookings had been made by the Medical Centre, the hotel staff expected to receive a group of doctors, but didn't bat an eyelid when they were confronted with eleven transgender people, who were made to feel very welcome. After three days of workshop, and very little time off, the group reluctantly took the boat back to Noumea. According to Didier Delfolie "The workshop and staying at the hotel made the group realise that they had many problems in common, and that they didn't know each other very well before."



In the six months since then, the sex workers have formed an association "Night and Day", which has as its objectives to support, prevent risks and defend the rights of those working in the sex industry. Monthly meetings have been held, often organised by the sex workers and held at one of their homes, sometimes at the Medical Centre.

Meetings have also been held with the municipal police authorities (and peer education trainings have been held for 10 of the younger policemen) and the CMP/Night and Day have enlisted the help of the local League of Human Rights. The League recently stepped in after a local night club added 'No transvestites' to the list of undesirable qualities in clients, on a notice at the door. According to Didier "This is taking us right back to World War II, 'no jews allowed'—they can't accept this or where will it end? You can't put 'No blacks, no whites, no green people', whatever." Used to such discrimination, the sex workers were at first reluctant to act. However, after a representative of the League of Human Rights spoke to the nightclub owner the sign was taken down.

A debriefing meeting at the end of the project in December 2000 gave a chance for various points of view to be heard. Participants included the Director of the municipal police, health and social workers and representatives of Night and Day and the League of Human Rights. Johanna from Night and Day said that policemen patrolling the port area at night still shout insults at them, but that things were worse three or four years ago. The Director of Police agreed that some of the older policemen had intolerant attitudes, it was hard to change this, but the younger ones working as peer educators could have an influence on them. Another problem the sex workers encountered was being asked for identity papers, and if they weren't carrying

them, being made to come down to the police station, where a file was opened in their name, despite the fact that they had done nothing illegal. And discrimination still abounds. Johanna told how at the beginning of the year a transsexual friend from Italy had come to stay

with her and they had made an appointment at the beautician's. The beautician's husband had taken the booking. When they turned up, the beautician said she couldn't take transgender people as it was bad for business. On hearing this the Director of Police commented "We can't make stupidity illegal... unfortunately!"

The association hopes to be able to make use of the media to change attitudes. They have been offered a slot on a lunchtime television programme, whenever they are ready. Another project is to approach the Town Hall regarding installation of a tap and rubbish bins to improve their working conditions at the port.

Asked how they would like the general public to see them, Sabrina was emphatic "No nastiness, no compassion, no pity for the trannies. We just want people to see us in a neutral way, to see us as they do anyone else. We want to be accepted as we are, despite our difference." With a sigh, she added, "We hope this will happen ... eventually."

And the last word is from Didier "Preventing discrimination is preventing HIV/AIDS". ●



Street educator Thierry Lefèvre pictured with Isle of Pines workshop participants.

"Helping the sex workers fight discrimination and regain a legitimate place in society..."

MICRONESIA: STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

BY AYDIN NAZMI

As I watch the hazy orange sun sink into the still blue sea overlooking Chuuk lagoon, I marked the end of another seemingly ordinary day in the Federated States of Micronesia. But this October day was special—it marked the beginning of a promising new era in Chuuk's fight against HIV and AIDS. For the past few months, several proceedings had set into motion a cascade of events that would ultimately (hopefully) benefit and educate the people of Chuuk state.

With a population of well over 50,000—about half living on the seven square mile capital island of Weno, Chuuk represents over half of all the Federated State of Micronesia population. Being by far the most densely populated state in the country, Chuuk has inevitably as many problems associated with many health care issues. For example, high rates of infant mortality (3%)¹, teen pregnancy (16%)², and STDs rank Chuuk among the highest in ill-health indicators in the Pacific. Moreover, these issues will continue to plague Chuuk until measures are taken to educate the future generations in the methods of prevention. Unfortunately, the public school system in Chuuk has negligible amounts of information related to reproductive health and sexuality. To further exacerbate the situation, cultural mores dictate that sexual and reproductive health are rarely discussed—even with one's own family. In fact, young people are so ill at ease to broach

subjects related to sex, even with health workers, that it is almost impossible to convey a message of sexual health—much less go to the Office of Public Health (OPH) to ask about related topics or pick up condoms (for fear of being seen doing such things).

This year, the OPH with financial support from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's AIDS Project began a quarterly newsletter called CHAT (Chuuk HIV/AIDS Topics) in hopes of spreading the word about AIDS. Aspiring to reach the largest possible audience, CHAT was printed in both English and Chuukese and provided fundamental information about HIV and AIDS. This newsletter was produced with help in the form of articles from several community leaders. For example, the first issue contained articles written by the Bishop, public health nurses, and educators. Despite the fact that the information contained within the newsletter had never been



“cultural mores dictate that sexual and reproductive health are rarely discussed”

taken to the Chuukese public, CHAT became surprisingly popular. In fact, the output of future newsletters was increased to meet the ever-increasing demand from the public. The third edition, which came out in September, contained a message from the governor of Chuuk state, Ansito Walter. This proved that CHAT was a success and that it had the support of the leaders of the state—more importantly, people were receptive to the message. The fourth edition of CHAT will be extended from 12 to 16 pages to make room for the special features planned by the editor. CHAT was one step in the right direction: it was simple, cheap, contained the appropriate message, and was popular.

The OPH has three major events planned for

reach the farthest outer islands in the state. The leaders of the Task Force and AIDS coordinators are striving to make the dream of Chuuk becoming a leader in AIDS awareness a reality. Three steps in the same direction.

As if all this were not enough, Chuuk was recently privileged to host two SPC-sponsored seminars on reproductive health and advocacy with Dr. Ezekiel Nukuro of the SPC/UNFPA project based in Suva. In October, Dr. Nukuro conducted two workshops entitled IEC (Information, Education, and Communication) and Advocacy for Reproductive Health. The opening ceremony included words from the Director of Health Services and Lt. Governor Manuel Sound who requested, “Do not be afraid or ashamed to talk about reproductive

health issues...if we are going to control these problems, we must talk about them.” Indeed, we must speak out—especially here in the Pacific where discussing sensitive issues is not always the norm, we must educate our future



generations and ourselves. The workshop had representatives from many areas including youth groups, women's groups, health workers, and church leaders. As the president of a youth group, Dino Dawe, a teacher from Chuuk High School planned to conduct a workshop for the young people in his village regarding the topics that were presented at the workshop. Dr. Siana Kurabui from Chuuk State Hospital was hopeful, “I think that the information that we learn from this workshop will motivate us [the health workers] to work harder to control the problems associated with poor family planning.” And Swanihda Robonei, Family Health Project Coordinator at FSM Department of Health

the upcoming months for AIDS awareness and reproductive health. First, the office is planning an extension clinic at the College of Micronesia (COM). This clinic is designed for the special needs of college-age youth. The extension clinic promises to be a safe and private place for young people to go with questions and issues regarding reproductive health. This clinic is planned to include the essentials of any youth clinic such as condoms, peer counseling, STD screening, and HIV/AIDS information. Second, the OPH plans to have a World AIDS Day 2000 event that will publicize information about AIDS on the radio, in live presentations, and on cable television. Third, the OPH, in conjunction with the Chuuk State AIDS Task Force has recently been putting in overtime planning the best strategy for attacking the AIDS issue. The Task Force, along with support from the staff at the OPH has put together a proposal that would allow Chuuk's AIDS awareness campaign to



AIDS Educators Aydin Nazmi and Stephen Strojny with COM Chuuk Students.





Aydin Nazmi presenting a plan for HIV/AIDS awareness in Chuuk at the IEC workshop.

who was also a part of the seminars remarked, "Chuuk is infamous for having very high levels of many of the ill health indicators for the FSM and Pacific. We hope that this workshop will teach participants the fundamentals and benefits of advocacy and how to take their message out into the public

efficiently. In doing so, we hope that Chuuk will regain some control of its reproductive health problems." Indeed, all the participants seemed optimistic by the end of the workshop. This was yet another step in the right direction for Chuuk.

More positive events are in the works for AIDS awareness in Chuuk: the editors of CHAT are planning popular radio drama programs aimed at AIDS education, COM is sponsoring two Peace Corps Volunteers to conduct 'AIDS Day' in classrooms, and the youth at COM are becoming more and more involved in AIDS awareness and plan to educate peer counselors is also in progress. Furthermore, the AIDS awareness team plans to operate a booth at the second annual Chuuk Youth Rally early in 2001.

The overwhelming majority of people with HIV—some 95% of the global total—live in the developing world. That proportion is set to grow even further as infection rates continue to rise in countries where poverty, poor health systems, and limited resources for prevention and care fuel the spread of the virus.³ This indicates that we in the Pacific are at high risk for increasing numbers of HIV and AIDS cases. Thus, we as members of the

Pacific community, regardless of capacity, must take action and join the fight against AIDS. When we look at other Pacific nations such as Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, we see positive trends that have been set in the past five years in educating people—especially youth—about the hazards of AIDS in an entertaining, and therefore well-liked and received manner. Groups from these areas actively produce very popular dramas and television programs dedicated to HIV/AIDS education for young people. And young people are the most important target audience for two reasons.



COM students promoting condom use on World AIDS Day.

First, they are in the majority—there are more youth than non-youth in the Pacific, and second, they represent the subset of the population that are contracting HIV at the highest rate. At the rate Chuuk is going, it will be no surprise when the FSM joins the growing number of Pacific Island nations that are truly informed about HIV/AIDS. Steps in the right direction have been taken in the past year that have been monumental in the development of Chuuk's AIDS awareness campaign and I, for one, have been impressed. ●

¹ Chuuk State Office of Public Health statistics; reflects numbers from hospital deliveries only

² Chuuk State Office of Public Health statistics; reflects numbers from hospital deliveries only

³ WHO statistical data

Aydin Nazmi is a Peace Corps volunteer based at the Chuuk Department of Public Health.

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Pacific cultures on the move together ...safely!



'Pacific cultures on the move together' was the theme of the 8th Festival of Pacific Arts, held in Noumea from 23 October to 3 November. With 3000 participants from all around the region, plus an influx of tourists for the occasion, it was a unique opportunity to spread the message about AIDS/STDs, plus condoms...

For ten days and ten nights, New Caledonia vibrated to the rhythm of Pacific performances of all kinds, staged in and around Noumea, but also in the north and the islands.

The local health department asked us if we could provide condoms to the delegations from the Pacific. This was an opportunity to raise a difficulty SPC has. We are not allowed to import Australian condoms, only French ones, others being considered of inferior quality.

We have tried before to get a dispensation, promising that we would distribute our condoms only to the English-speaking countries. We have not been given permission. This time we explained once again that we simply can't afford to buy French

condoms in bulk.

As the date was drawing nearer, and the local health authorities did not wish to use their stocks for the Festival, common sense prevailed and we were allowed to import Australian condoms especially.

In Noumea, the heart of the Festival was at Anse Vata, on the former SPC site. SPC also hosted the Festival during 5 days at its new site 2 minutes walk up the road.



SPC AIDS Project Coordinator, Judith Taylor, with Lily Vainerere, who kindly helped man our stand for us.



Wearing condom costumes designed by Andrew Peteru and made by Judith Taylor, two young members of the kanak health NGO, ADSPPK, went around the Festival village handing out condoms.





Monica Vainerere and Catherine Sipa (left), who is currently our project assistant, in front of the SPC stand.

SPC's AIDS Project had a stand in the Festival village, shared with the Pacific Women's Resource Bureau and the Youth office. It was manned permanently, including weekends, and distributed special Festival editions of our condom packet, poster and t-shirt, plus information leaflets. Condoms, posters and leaflets were provided to the accommodation sites for all the Pacific Island delegations, and including what was distributed to the general public from our stand, almost 10,000 condoms were given out over the 10 days of the Festival.



Update on the HIV and seafarers project

Talofa and bonjour to you all at the: Fiji School of Maritime Studies, Samoa Polytechnic School of Maritime Training, Tonga Maritime Polytechnical Institute, Kiribati Maritime Training Centre, Kiribati Fisheries Training Centre, Tuvalu Maritime College, Vanuatu Maritime College, Solomon Islands school of Marine and Fisheries Studies, the FSM Micronesian Maritime and Fisheries Academy, and the Marshall Islands and Nautical Training Centre.

We trust all is going well with your respective programmes and that you had a festive Christmas and New Year.

It was great meeting some of you during the past year. We are looking forward to continuing our partnership with you and developing new and exciting ways to win the battle against AIDS!

With regards to our peer education component of the project, four things remain.



1. Provide train the trainers (TOT) sessions in peer education

Our partnership with AIDS Task Force of Fiji (ATFF) allows us to provide you with training on how to select and train peer educators, in collaboration with a local NGO specialising in peer education. Samoa, Vanuatu and Kiribati have completed this training. New partners brought on board were Sautiamai Catholic Services, Vanuatu Young Peoples Project (VYPP), and the Kiribati Red Cross Society. We are hoping to complete the TOT with all of you by mid 2001.



This of course means that we have a hectic programme ahead of us, but I am sure we all agree that it is something that must be done. Congratulations and thank you for all your hard work, and also for being so accommodating to us despite your busy schedules.

Don't forget to drop me a line if you need anything or require any information: Andrew Peteru, Training Officer, SPC HIV/AIDS & STD Project, phone (687) 26 20 00, fax: (687) 26 38 18, e-mail: andrewp@spc.int

2. Carry out local peer education training

After receiving the train the trainer peer education training, ATFF and your local NGO will support you when you run your first training session. This training of course will be yourselves training maritime students and seafarers to become peer educators on board shipping vessels. The Vanuatu Maritime Training College successfully completed its workshop with ATFF and VYPP. Kiribati is hoping to have its workshop in January, and Samoa during March.



3. IEC materials

This will be a suitable and appropriate information source that peer educators will be able to take with them on board the ships and distribute as well.

4. Support network

Again, we will be consulting with you all as to how the peer educators can best receive support while at sea.



Fiji: STDs high among teens

High school students and school dropouts between the ages of 16-25 top the number of patients at Lautoka Hospital's Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) Clinic.

Medical Officer in charge of the clinic Dr Arvin Chaudhry said the increase was dramatic and worrying. "There is an increase which is alarming because previously patients were only adults but now we have pre-adolescents as patients," he said. Dr Chaudhry said 65 per cent of the patients seen were between 16-25 years, of age, school students or high school dropouts who commonly have gonorrhoea.

"A lot of education is needed as we are sitting on a time bomb ready to explode and when it does Fiji will face a major crisis," he said.

Statistics released by the Ministry of Health showed patients between the ages of 25-29 recorded the highest infection rate of syphilis Fiji-wide. Patients between the ages of 20-24 recorded the highest infection rate of gonorrhoea Fiji wide. Dr Nii-K Plange, the Head of the Sociology Department at the University of the South Pacific said the trends were very dangerous. "This is not the case in Lautoka only but every centre in Fiji," he said. "With the increase in gonorrhoea and syphilis there is a real danger of HIV increasing".

"In most cases STI patients who are under treatment stop their medication once they are feeling better or

the symptoms go away and while they still have the infection, they have sexual encounters spreading it even further," he said.

Dr Plange said medical authorities should take into account that whatever statistics they have are only from those that visit a hospital or clinic and the statistics are much smaller than the real number. Dr Plange said this also showed that people were not taking care of their sexual behaviour. Interim Minister for Health Pita Nacuva said it was time to address this issue very seriously.

"The most essential thing is to introduce education as prevention is better than cure," he said. Mr Nacuva said the budget for next year has a lot of provision for education and more would be done in this area to help youths learn more about their bodies.

Coordinator of the Aids Task Force of Fiji, Jane Tyler said this was a problem faced by the whole of Fiji. "Until students are given accurate information, including in schools, in language they can understand, and in a youth friendly manner which promotes informed and responsible decision-making in relation to their sexual health, we could expect further increases in STI infection rates, and not only in Lautoka, but in other areas of Fiji. ●

Adapted from: Daily Post, Tuesday, November 28, 2000

Papua New Guinea: Men urged to take proactive role

Men have been urged to use their aggressive traits to take a proactive role in preventing the spread of AIDS. Health Secretary Dr Puka Temu said HIV/AIDS affected all sectors of the community and he believed men could make a positive difference in the fight against the disease.

Dr Temu said: "Men can use their masculinity and macho quality in a more productive, positive way by choosing healthy behaviour, using condoms during sex with unknown partners, sticking to one partner or being tested for HIV or other sexually transmitted infections." He continued, "They should use their leadership positions in politics, industry, church and communities to establish laws, policies, roles and development agendas to protect the health of women and children." He said

men in power must move away from selfishness and greed and create an environment for sharing the nation's wealth equitably so that everyone had the chance to be empowered to benefit from the natural resources.

"I believe men, individually and collectively, at all levels, in all sectors of our community can make a very big difference in the health of our people of our land and make a far greater impact in our collective fight against HIV/AIDS. I call upon all men to relook at what they are doing to themselves and their people, humble themselves and move away from the destructive path to the path of positive contribution". ●

Papua New Guinea Post-Courier/PINA Nius Online, 29 November 2000

Solomon Islands: Official warns of AIDS potential despite no reported cases

The Solomon Islands has yet to officially report any AIDS case. However, one HIV-positive case was reported by health authorities in 1994.

Under-Secretary for Health Improvement in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Dr Dennie Iniakwala, says no further cases have been reported despite the series of HIV tests conducted on high-risk individuals and suspected cases over the past years. He says however that the potential for more

cases is very high, as shown by studies on sexual knowledge, attitude and practices in the country.

Dr Iniakwala says it is also alarming that other sexually transmitted infections continue to increase in the country. And in the light of such findings, the under-secretary says there is no room for complacency. ●

Source: Solomon Islands Ministry of Commerce web site, Honiara, as reported by BBC Monitoring Service, 4 December 2000



"...we are sitting on a time bomb ready to explode and when it does Fiji will face a major crisis,"

"The most essential thing is to introduce education as prevention is better than cure,"

Northern Mariana Islands: Men could make a difference

Almost 70 per cent of the current 38 confirmed cases of HIV infections and AIDS in the Northern Marianas were among men, the Department in Public Health disclosed. Deaths from HIV and AIDS in men outnumber those in women in the islands.

With this reality, the Northern Marianas has joined the annual AIDS campaign "Men Make A Difference".

Governor Pedro P. Tenorio signed both the World AIDS Day and the CNMI HIV/AIDS Month proclamations, and urged the whole community to take part in the government's anti-HIV/AIDS and education awareness campaigns. "We need to address these problems, it affects the whole community," Tenorio said at the proclamation signing ceremonies attended by health officials and volunteers. "Men are less likely than women to seek needed health care, and are more likely to engage in behaviour—such as drinking, using illegal substances or driving recklessly—that puts their health at risk. In stressful situations such as living with AIDS, men may need additional assistance to cope effectively," said Tenorio.

The proclamation said HIV is more easily transmitted sexually from men to women than vice versa. On average, men have more sex partners than women. A man with HIV is therefore more likely to infect more people over a lifetime than an HIV positive woman.

"Men must give greater consideration to AIDS as it affects the

family. Fathers and future fathers should be encouraged to consider the impact of irresponsible sexual behaviour on their partners and children, including introducing HIV into the family and leaving the children behind as AIDS orphans. Men also need to take a greater role in caring for family members with HIV or AIDS," Tenorio said.

Health Secretary Joseph Kevin Villagomez, meanwhile, said local residents would also have to undergo HIV/AIDS test, just like non-resident workers,

"The goal is to have more people residing in the CNMI, those that are from here, to come and get free testing during this period," Villagomez told the Variety. He said while this year's theme focuses on men, it does not necessarily mean that women need not be aware of these health problems. "The HIV/AIDS problem affects all of us and education is a key foundation. We need to continue to educate," said the health secretary.

Activities for the Northern Marianas HIV/AIDS month included media coverage, letters to the clergy, putting up information booths, World AIDS Day media roadblock, poster making contest, a candlelight vigil, a videothon at the Joeton Kiyu Public Library, An AIDS walkathon, and facts training for nurses and other interested staff. ●

Source: Haidee V. Eugenio, Marianas Variety /PINA Nius Online, 12 December 2000

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australian Government: Regional delegates to attend international HIV/AIDS Congress

Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, recently announced that he will convene a special session for ministers and senior officials in the region in conjunction with the 6th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific, to be held in Melbourne in October 2001.

He will invite the ministers and senior officials to discuss the broad range of problems caused by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, including social, economic, financial, employment, education and other issues.

HIV/AIDS threatens to reverse decades of development in the region, and is therefore one of the highest priorities of the Australian aid program. In 1999-2000, the Australian aid program allocated an estimated \$20.3 million to HIV/AIDS programs, 12.3 per cent of total health sector expenditure.

The Australian Government will also commit \$200,000 to support the 6th International

Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific to assist people from the region to participate so others can learn from their experiences in HIV/AIDS prevention.

This initiative follows the \$200 million global commitment I announced in July to help partner countries in the Asia Pacific region deal with the threat of HIV/AIDS.

Mr Downer said that HIV/AIDS strikes people in their most productive years and leaves millions of orphaned children. It also disrupts key sectors such as agriculture, education, manufacturing and transport. For this reason, political leaders need to commit themselves to making HIV/AIDS a whole of economy issue, and to make more resources available to fight the spread as well as to address the dire effects of this disease.

The meeting on HIV/AIDS and development at the Melbourne Congress, along with the attendance of delegates from around the region, will help achieve this goal. ●

Adapted from Press release from Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer, Thursday, 23 November 2000

Seaweed gel to combat HIV

Seaweed may not only be useful in Japanese cuisine—if ongoing research proves successful, it may be crucial in the fight against Aids.

Scientists are currently working on a seaweed gel that will prevent transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. The gel would be inserted into a woman's vagina before sex, and thus would have the advantage of giving women control of the product, unlike condoms.

The New York-based Population Council has been working for about 10 years on the product, carrageenan, which has the trademark name Carraguard or PC-515. The gel, long used in anti-ageing cosmetics and in the food industry, does not kill HIV but prevents the virus entering human cells.

Human trials have now started in Thailand and South Africa to test whether women are comfortable with the product and to check for side-effects. About 165 married women in Chiang Rai, Thailand, will use the gel, to be applied an hour

before sex.

"If these studies are successful—which we expect they will be—we then need to go to a large-scale trial to test its effectiveness [against HIV]," said George Brown, the Population Council's vice-president of international programmes. The research aims to provide a product affordable in poor countries.

The absence of an HIV vaccine and the lack of access to AIDS drugs in developing countries have led to research in vaginal microbicides. "Women need a product to protect themselves," Mr Brown told BBC News Online in a telephone interview. He said women could not always get their partners to use condoms, which were only used "at very low levels", despite enormous promotion efforts.

Researchers believe the gel will work by providing a protective coating on the surface of the vagina. Laboratory tests have shown that it prevents transmission of HIV, Robin Maguire, the Population Council's programme manager for microbicides, said.

She said they had decided to investigate the

"Women need a product to protect themselves"

"... Men also need to take a greater role in caring for family members with HIV or AIDS,"



seaweed—found off the Chilean coast—because it came from a class of compounds known as sulphated polysaccharides, long known to be effective against viruses. ●

AIDS infection rates explode

BERLIN, Nov 28: Some 5.3 million people caught the AIDS virus in the last year, with an explosion of infections in Eastern Europe.

Experts also fear the number of people with HIV/AIDS will top 36 million by the end of the 2000.

A UNAIDS/World Health Organisation joint report said that the estimated 36.1 million people who will have the HIV virus or AIDS by the end of the year was 50 per cent higher than the figure the WHO projected in 1991.

In all regions except sub Saharan Africa, more men have been hit by AIDS than women, the report also said, blaming male behaviour and cultural notions of masculinity for the trend. As a result, UNAIDS has this year launched a special campaign to alter such behaviour.

The report also revealed that the AIDS epidemic is exploding in the former Soviet bloc, with the number of cases of HIV infection soaring to 700,000, compared with 420,000 just a year ago.

UNAIDS executive director Peter Piot said most of the new infections were among users of injected drugs, while other contributing factors included a rise in prostitution due to increased poverty and the collapse of health and social services.

Piot said the increase could be seen from Estonia on the Baltic to Uzbekistan in Central Asia, but said the situation was particularly dramatic in Russia, where new infections have been more numerous this year than in all previous years combined.

By the end of the year the number of HIV infected people in Russia was expected to have more than doubled to 300,000, from an estimated 130,000 at the end of 1999, he said.

Piot said there were some three million users of the injected drug in heroin in Russia.

But he said there was still an opportunity to prevent a major catastrophe in eastern Europe. A key step was recognition by governments that the effect could be as dramatic as economic crisis or civil war.

Piot said the situation in sub Saharan Africa remained “catastrophic” as the world’s most affected region and that there the epidemic was “bound to get worse before it gets better”.

Source: Mangai Balasegaram, BBC News Online, Thursday, 9 November, 2000

The report said an estimated 3.8 million people became infected with the AIDS causing virus in sub Saharan Africa during the last year, compared with four million new infections in the region in 1999.

This brought the number of people with HIV/AIDS in the region to 25.3 million. At the same time 2.4 million people died of AIDS in Africa this year, according to the report.

But Piot noted that parts of sub Saharan Africa are now showing stable or reduced rates of infection. The report says this may be due to better prevention programs, such as in Uganda, or simply because there are now fewer people left in at risk groups.

Piot also said that apparently stabilised rates of infection such as in Kenya were still a “very relative” gain, and that there were “reasons to expect” a rise in infection in Nigeria.

The report also stresses the sharp economic and social impact of the AIDS epidemic in Africa through its decimation of work forces or teachers. Coinciding with the report, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) called on governments, industry and public opinion in both the developed and underdeveloped world to give massive support to an AIDS awareness campaign among young people.

Young people in particular are threatened by the world epidemic, and they hold the key to fighting the spread of the disease, UNICEF executive director Carol Bellamy said in Berlin.

UNICEF said studies show prevention campaigns are working in some of the worst hit African countries: both in Uganda and Zambia awareness programs had greatly helped reduce the rate of infection among young people.

Bellamy challenged AIDS ravaged countries to devote more resources, energy and creativity to using schools in the battle against the epidemic.

“Schools give the state a unique capacity in nearly every family, in every community, every day,” she said.

People aged between 15 to 24 account for nearly a third of all people living with HIV infection or AIDS, but young people are more open to changing their behaviour, Bellamy said. ●

Source: AAP

DEAR PASA

Dear PASA

❖ Thank you very much for the parcels. The booklets were very useful and have been distributed to youth and friends and I have also showed the video tapes.

I would like some more booklets to give out to the squatters and the settlements. I’ve also written to the National AIDS Council and the PNG Institute of Medical Research as suggested, and have asked for the Joseph Berem tape.

Thank you once again for the support your office is giving to the people of the Pacific.

Mike Kamo, Madang, Papua New Guinea

❖ Please kindly put us on your mailing list and send us your most informative Pacific AIDS Alert Bulletin which you send to others.

We just read one of issues which featured one of our countrymen, Joseph Berem, and we are fascinated by the great work you are doing and we believe in working together in partnership to fight this disease through our awareness and mobilization programme here in this country.

Just for your information, we carry out awareness campaigns on many different issues, including environment, health, social issues, population and gender. Our Director, Alphonse Roy does radio broadcasts on population and gender issues. He is now travelling around the country with our team doing

awareness programmes. We also conduct awareness on STDs and HIV/AIDS right down to rural village level. The fact is that not everyone has information and we are trying our best to get the message across to them.

We thank you for your attention and forthcoming assistance.

Environmental, Cultural & Spiritual Conservation, Waigani Campus, NCD, PNG

❖ I want to express our heartfelt thanks for written material that you have been sending to the Communication Institute. In turn, we share excerpts with other dioceses in the country through our newsletter. The communication coordinators of the dioceses also give the information to their people. Therefore, all people of PNG are benefitting. More power to you for all the good you are doing!

Sr Theresita de Lara, Communication Institute, Madang, PNG.

❖ I am replying to a letter of thanks by Guylian Canasta that was published in Pacific AIDS alert no. 18, 1999. I know it’s quite a while back but I need to let people know that there is a sexual minorities project that caters for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people in Fiji.

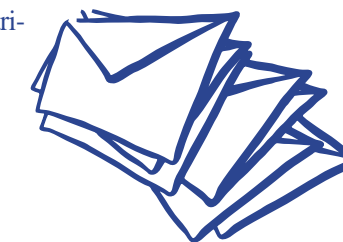
Women’s Action for Change (WAC), was started in 1993 by a collective of women. It has three current projects. The first is a professional theatre group, WAC Theatre Unlimited, which does plays on human rights, environment, women and youth

issues, mental health, and road safety. The second is a child care centre that was set up to cater for low income earners, mainly garment factory workers. The third project is the sexual minorities project, which is run by gay people to cater for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. The focus of this project is to help individual and group self-esteem, affirm sexual orientation, lifestyles and cultivate a sense of community. WAC/SM project is the only organisation that caters for the gay community in Fiji. It has a fulltime coordinator and a voluntary worker. Since the gay community is protected under the current constitution, we monitor any discrimination that affects us (eg. the media and the public (verbal abuse and hate speech)). If anyone has enquiries about the Sexual Minorities Project, please feel free to call, write, or e-mail us at the address below.

Sexual Minorities Project, Women’s Action for Change, P.O. Box 12398, Suva, Fiji. Fax (679) 305 033, phone (679) 314 363, e-mail: wac@is.com.fj

❖ I have just received your new AIDS poster [AIDS does not respect tradition, culture or religion]. It is superb and we wholeheartedly agree with the message. I would like to distribute it widely in French Polynesia. We would like 400 copies, would this be possible? We can make a financial contribution if necessary.

Dr Bruno Hubert, Department of Health, Papeete, Tahiti, French Polynesia



“Young people in particular are threatened by the world epidemic, and they hold the key to fighting the spread of the disease,”

RESOURCES

PACIFIC WOMEN
AGAINST AIDS



Pacific women against AIDS.

UNAIDS, Suva, 2000. 24 pages

“Women are in the vanguard of the fight against HIV/AIDS in the Pacific. In most sectors, they are taking the lead in advocating and working for the changes that need to be made to facilitate behaviour change. This booklet features some of the Pacific women who have been work-

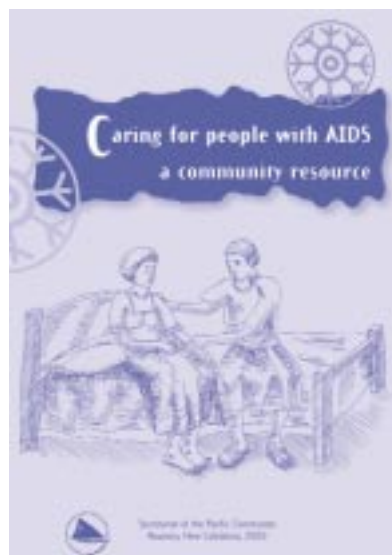
ing with UNAIDS. I am pleased to be one of these women. There are many more. This booklet is dedicated to them and especially to the HIV-positive women in the Pacific” says Adi Lady Lala Mara of Fiji in the foreword to this attractive and inspiring booklet. Available from: *Steven Vete, UNAIDS, c/- UNDP, Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji. E-mail: Steven.Vete@undp.org*

Caring for people with AIDS: a community resource.

SPC, Noumea, 2000. 33 pages

Caring for someone with AIDS is the same as caring for anyone else who is sick. But people with AIDS need extra care because they can get infections very easily. This booklet, adapted for Pacific conditions, particularly countries where AIDS treatment drugs are unavailable, gives practical advice to the carer. It includes information on hygiene, how to cope with health problems commonly experienced by people with AIDS, caring for a child with HIV/AIDS, and death and dying.

Copies are available from: *HIV/AIDS & STD Project, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, B.P. D5, 98848 Noumea Cedex, New Caledonia. Tel. (687) 26 20 00, fax: (687) 26 38 18, e-mail: spc@spc.int*



1st Pacific Regional Conference on HIV/AIDS and STD,

Nadi, Fiji, February 1999.
Conference proceedings. SPC, Noumea, 2000.

Yes, the proceedings of our first ever regional conference on HIV/AIDS and STD are finally available. We apologise for the length of time this has taken, due to circumstances beyond our control. The

proceedings give a valuable overview of the nature of the epidemic in the Pacific, the social and economic conditions affecting the spread of HIV, and some of the innovative steps being taken to control it.

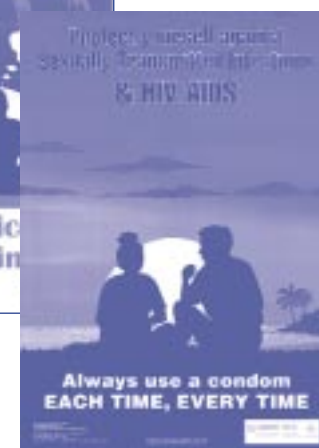
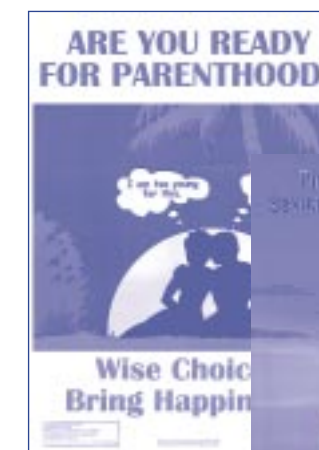
Available from: *HIV/AIDS & STD Project, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, B.P. D5, 98848 Noumea Cedex, New Caledonia. Tel. (687) 26 20 00, fax: (687) 26 38 18, e-mail: spc@spc.int*



UNFPA population posters

A series of five posters has been developed by the Population Advocacy and Reproductive Health Advocacy project, SPC Suva. The attractive posters, designed by the project's own graphic design team, cover condoms, planned parenthood, peer pressure, vasectomy, and parents talking to children about family life.

Available from: *Dr Ezekiel Nukuro, the Population Advocacy and Reproductive Health Advocacy project, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji. Tel. (679) 370 733 (679) 370 021, e-mail: ezekieln@spc.int*



STI/HIV series.

WHO Western Pacific Regional Office, Manila.

Here are some of the latest titles in this useful series

Antenatal Clinic STI survey, Apia, Samoa. 27 pages.

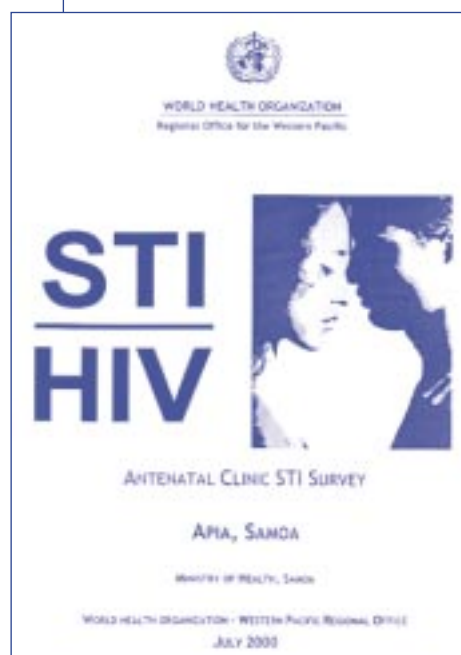
Antenatal Clinic STI survey, Port Vila, Vanuatu. 31 pages

Guidelines for HIV/AIDS, STI, and behavioural risk factors surveillance: Pacific island countries and areas. 22 pages.

Status and trends of STI, HIV and AIDS at the end of the millennium, Western Pacific region, 1999. 104 pages.

100% condom use programme in entertainment establishments. 36 pages.

The series or individual reports are available from: *Dr Gilles Pומרol, Western Pacific Regional Office, WHO, P.O. box 2932, Manila 1000, Philippines. Fax: (632) 521 1036, e-mail: HSI@wpro.who.int*



ICAAP Conference

Sixth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP), Melbourne, 5-10 October 2000.

(Theme = ‘Breaking down barriers’)

The registration brochure for the 6th ICAAP is now available. Those of you who are on our core mailing list should have received the brochure, which was mailed out with the Proceedings of the 1st Pacific Regional Conference on HIV/AIDS and STD.

If *Pacific AIDS alert* is the only publication you receive from us, you will need to request a copy of the ICAAP brochure direct from the organisers at the following address:

General correspondence:

ICAAP Conference Manager
ICMS Pty Ltd, 84 Queensbridge Street,
Southbank, VIC 3006, Australia
Tel. (61) 3 9682 0244
Fax: (61) 3 9682 0288
E-mail: 6icaap@icms.com.au

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E-mail: sponsorship@icaap.conf.au
Web site: <http://www.icaap.conf.au>

