

Project Title:**HIV risk reduction and support services for drug abusers, SARDA****(Project Code: PPE 615PM)****Executive Summary:****Aim and Objectives**

The aims of this Programme are: (1) to reduce HIV/AIDS risk behaviours among injecting drug users (IDUs) in the community; and (2) to help HIV-infected methadone patients improve compliance with medical and drug treatment, develop proper skills in self-care and reduce involvement in risky behaviours that will lead to the spread of the disease.

This Programme consists of two Projects, namely Phoenix Project and Spark Action. The objectives of the Phoenix Project are to: (a) increase the awareness on HIV/AIDS among drug users; (b) discourage IDUs from sharing needles/syringes; (c) encourage IDUs to use condom during intercourse; and (d) encourage IDUs to attend HIV antibody test. The objectives of the Spark Action are to: (a) encourage HIV-infected methadone patients to adhere to medical services on HIV/AIDS and drug treatment programmes; (b) equip them with the skills in proper self-care and reduction of risky behaviours; and (c) encourage them to be involved in non-drug using social activities.

Project design

The Phoenix Project recruits and trains a group of former drug users to act as outreaching volunteers to visit methadone patients and street addicts. They distribute HIV/AIDS educational materials, provide peer counseling services, and introduce drug treatment services and health care services to IDUs.

Once a new HIV-infected methadone patient is identified by Methadone Urine Testing, the medical officer will seek the client's consent to receive follow-up services provided by SARDA's social workers. If consent is given, Spark Action will provide supportive counseling, information giving, referral, escort service, assessment, monitoring, and risk reduction counseling at this crisis stage. After the crisis stage, Spark Action will provide the following services: counseling on the disclosure of the disease, risk reduction education for intimate partner, remove barriers to treatment compliance, education on proper self-care, social connection building, and cash assistance. Periodical case progress reports are submitted to the Integrated Treatment Centre at quarterly intervals.

Target population

The target populations of the Programme are injecting drug users and HIV-infected methadone patients.

Main achievements

Between April 2012 and March 2015, Phoenix Project conducted a total of 1,104 outreach sessions with 30,786 contacts made with street drug users, in which 3,634 were new immigrants and ethnic minorities. The latest survey was conducted in 2014 with a sample of 695 drug users. The findings revealed that 78.4% of the respondents attended a HIV test, 70.7% used condom in their last sexual intercourse, and 86.8% did not share needles in their last injection.

During the same period, Spark Action had served 80 HIV-infected methadone patients and successfully referred 85.0% of all identified cases to the Integrated Treatment Centre of the Department of Health for further medical treatment on HIV/AIDS. Spark Action also provided 424 incidents of emergency financial support to cash-strapped patients in coping with unexpected financial crisis, organized 222 social activities form, and distributed 308 sets of health education kits to, the HIV-infected patients. A newsletter was published semi-annually as a communication platform between HIV-infected patients which fosters an atmosphere of mutual support.

Conclusions

The Programme was first funded by the AIDS Trust Fund in 2003, and has since been providing services to both injecting drug users and HIV-infected methadone patients in Hong Kong. The Programme will continue to work hard to help Hong Kong maintain a low HIV prevalence rate.