

Strategic Plan in IDU Intervention

As part of enhancing the efficiency of Injecting Drug User (IDU) intervention in Kerala in the backdrop of the high prevalence rate of HIV / AIDS among IDUs, a workshop was conducted at Hotel Chaithram in Thiruvananthapuram. Held on the 30th of December 2008, the workshop led by Mr. Mahesh Nathan, IDU expert from West Bengal SACS was inaugurated by Dr. Usha Titus I.A.S., Project Director, Kerala State AIDS Control Society.

The inaugural function of the workshop was presided over by Mr. Dennis Joseph, Joint Director (TI), KSACS. Others who were present during the inaugural function include Dr. T. V. Velayudhan, Additional Project Director, KSACS, Dr. M. Prasanna Kumar, Team Head, TSU, Mr. Jayachandran, Additional Director, Finance, KSACS, Mr. Jaison T. J., Additional Director, TI, KSACS, Mr. Vimal Ravi, Specialist (TI), TSU and Mr. Anil K Nair, Documentation Consultant.

In her inaugural address, Dr. Usha Titus I.A.S., Project Director, KSACS said that while the emphasis of the first and second stages of NACP were on SW and MSM intervention, the third stage has its focus on HIV among IDUs. The workshop being held should be seen as a beginning and regular follow-ups are required in the form of strategic planning, seminars and more workshops to achieve the goal, she said.

Addressing the workshop participants, Dr. T. V. Velayudhan, Additional Project Director, KSACS said that, the prevalence rate of 7.8% in Kerala warns of a critical situation, which needs immediate attention to bring it down at any cost.

The one-day workshop kicked off with a presentation on the current scenario of HIV / AIDS among IDUs in Kerala by Dr. M. Prasanna Kumar, Team Head, TSU. It was followed by deliberations and presentations by IDU expert from West Bengal SACS, Mr. Mahesh Nathan.

The presentation by Mr. Nathan touched on a wide area of IDU topics, starting from its definition, harm reduction, priorities, BCC to setting up of DICs in case of emergencies, enabling environment, vulnerabilities and advocacy. According to Mr. Nathan, the rate of spread of HIV by sharing needles among IDUs was 7.2 times more than through SWs and MSMs. Due to the geographical positioning of India, the country has become a transit state for narcotic products and hence the local population is getting involved in it and later become users, he pointed out. In IDU intervention, what is paramount now is to curb needle exchange rather than condom promotion and STI checks, because the urge for sex among IDUs decline as they become chronic users.

The workshop also had Mr. Nazar a PE with FPAI, an NGO involved in TI among IDUs in Trivandrum, sharing his experience with the participants of the workshop. Mr. Nazar urged the participants to ensure the active role of current IDUs in the HIV campaign programs, but many of them are reluctant to put in their service due to fear of harassment by police, Mr. Nazar said.

Based on the workshop, KSACS would soon come up with a strategic planning on IDU intervention in Kerala. A draft action plan for strengthening the intervention at field level has been formulated.