



PEPtalk

News you can use
from PEPFAR Côte d'Ivoire

No. 4, October 2008

U.S. Government visits PEPFAR Côte d'Ivoire

U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Michael O. Leavitt visited Côte d'Ivoire Aug. 13-14 to see the progress that the PEPFAR program has been making over the past four years. The first U.S. cabinet-level official to visit in a decade, Leavitt was accompanied by U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Julie Gerberding and other senior staff from USAID, CDC, and HHS.

Leavitt led the team on visits to the Retro-CI Project, the Hope Worldwide CASM clinic, and three sites in the Bouaké area (a mosque, a village, and the Centre SAS clinic), twice undergoing HIV testing with the new finger-prick method to encourage Ivorians to get tested. He also met with Prime Minister Soro Guillaume to discuss national health priorities and PEPFAR commitments.

Gerberding said the visit was intended not only to witness first-hand some of the accomplishments of PEPFAR, but also to promote collaboration between U.S. and African governments. "Among the most important things I observed on this journey is the depth and longevity of the work of CDC staff," she said in a summary of her trip. "It shows in direct impacts on the men, women, and children of Africa. Again and again our African friends expressed gratitude and affection for our staff, and we're very happy to show that they added their own investment to ours, often to a profound effect. We can all be very proud to be a part of this good work."



Secretary Leavitt at a village ceremony in Bouaké

"Life is joy and happiness...!" How a care and treatment project has given new hope to HIV+ sex workers

Life had not been easy for Hadi. Single and illiterate, she engaged in sex work to provide for her two children. Like most other women in Côte d'Ivoire, Hadi dreamed of getting married one day. At 20 years old, her dream became a reality. She got married, stopped working as a sex worker, and became pregnant with her third child. Near the end of her pregnancy, however, her husband began to show symptoms of AIDS and died soon thereafter. Hadi herself became very ill and decided to take an HIV test; she was terrified.

Her HIV test came back positive. At that moment, Hadi said, "For me, life had ended that day." As a widow, without resources or familial support, she resumed working as a sex worker to survive. It was then that she met a peer educator at the Clinique de Confiance and started to frequent the clinic for medical care. ARV treatment was made available just in time to save her life, and since then, she has been committed to helping others like herself.

Hadi has become an active leader through the sharing of her powerful testimonies and over the past several years, has become a devoted peer educator at the Clinique de Confiance. She acts as a counselor for seropositive sex workers and is one of the founders of an HIV support group named Bletty (meaning "hope").

The Clinique de Confiance, a confidential clinic for sex workers in Abidjan, is a model for broadening the scope of HIV/AIDS interventions in Côte d'Ivoire by way of the PAPO-HV Project (Assistance Project for Highly Vulnerable Populations). This project is financed by PEPFAR and implemented by Family Health International and its partner, the Institute of Tropical Medicine. Papo in the local language is a word used to describe the protective covering or roof of a house. In the same sense, the PAPO-HV Project provides a safe place for sex workers to receive HIV prevention messages, along with care and treatment for those who are seropositive.



The shoulder of a sex worker attending the Clinique de Confiance for a routine appointment. Photo by Nadia Bettega

Services are free of charge and include behavior change messages, condom promotion, STI treatment, HIV counseling and testing, and care and treatment for HIV-positive sex workers and their families. Prevention activities at the centers and in the field are supported by local peer educators. The PAPO-HIV Project has provided prevention and care services to more than 10,000 sex workers, 293 of who are currently on ARV treatment.

Comprehensive community-based programs like PAPO-HIV have had a considerable impact on the lives of people like Hadi. Despite the obstacles, she continues to remain motivated in order to "help and encourage my sisters," she says. Life did not end for Hadi. On the contrary, she now says, "Life is joy and happiness, and guess what? I will be a grandmother soon! Isn't that wonderful?!"

ARVs now free of charge in Côte d'Ivoire

Antiretroviral medications (ARVs) for people living with HIV/AIDS are now free at all public health facilities in Côte d'Ivoire, the country's Minister of Health and Public Hygiene has decreed. The change, effective Aug. 20, 2008, drops the 1,000 FCFA (\$2) per-month charge in effect

New in HIV

since 2006 and marks the successful culmination of a lengthy advocacy effort, supported by PEPFAR, to eliminate this barrier to universal access as well as to financial transparency. The new government decree, underpinned by ARVs supplied by PEPFAR, the Global Fund, and the Clinton Foundation, has significant implications for people who need ARV treatment.

Yaya Coulibaly, president of RIP+ (the national network of PLWHA organizations), says, "This is a very important step for us and our friends. It's a success in the fight that we began four years ago." He added, however, that paying for blood tests and medications for opportunistic infections is still a challenge for people living with HIV and remains an issue to be tackled.

New Partner

Who: AVSI Foundation

Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale

What: Working with social centers and local subpartners (through subgrants, capacity building, and mentoring) to provide educational, psychosocial, health, and other types of support to at least 3,500 orphans and vulnerable children (OVC); will work towards strengthening the "platform" system of coordinated, comprehensive OVC care and support.

When: Started activities in Côte d'Ivoire in October 2008 with USAID/PEPFAR funding

Where: Around social centers and through subpartners in Yopougon, Abobo, and Bouaké

What else: AVSI's PEPFAR-funded OVC programs in Rwanda, Kenya, and Uganda have provided care and support for more than 12,000 OVC and their communities through an operative network of 100 local partners, with a particular emphasis on education, economic strengthening, and the well-being and dignity of the child within the family and community.

How to contact: Carlo M. Zorzi, (225) 09 00 62 83, 48 05 97 41, carlo.zorzi@avsi.org, Web site: www.avsi.org



AVSI Director
Carlo Zorzi

Baby ACONDA: Mission a success

In coaching health-care staff, nothing beats the hands-on approach. A team from the PEPFAR Côte d'Ivoire partner ACONDA-VS CI was in the Soubré health district in March and April 2008 to coach staff at three rural health centers in HIV counseling and testing, HIV/AIDS care, and data and pharmacy management.

With the midwife at Yabayo out sick, delegation chief Dr. Denis Niamien stepped in to do prenatal consultations, complete with a proposal of an HIV test. That's when a 30-year-old client arrived for her first consultation – in full labor. Dr. Niamien, who had worked as a gynecologist before joining ACONDA, didn't hesitate. The woman tested negative for HIV and gave birth to a healthy baby girl, immediately dubbed "Baby ACONDA."

"I was very happy to be able to help her bring her little girl into the world," Dr. Niamien said. "It was a pleasure." The ACONDA team left the Yabayo staff better equipped, better trained, and in high spirits – mission accomplished and more.

"Baby ACONDA" was the crowning touch for a successful coaching mission by ACONDA-VS.



20th Anniversary of Retro-CI

It all began in 1988 when a CDC epidemiologist teamed up with a young Ivorian physician to address questions about HIV-2 in West Africa. What started as a two-room operation evolved into Côte d'Ivoire's first national reference laboratory and a training ground for a generation of leading international AIDS researchers.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Projet Retro-CI, a Ministry of Health and CDC collaboration whose many groundbreaking activities include the AZT/PMTCT, cotrimoxazole and microbicide trials. RETRO-CI now concentrates on offering technical and program management assistance to PEPFAR supported HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment services throughout the country. Mathieu Maran, a lab technician who has been with Retro-CI since the beginning, says, "The future of this project is very important for Côte d'Ivoire. It was the Retro-CI studies which proved the existence and magnitude of the disease in this country. I stayed for 20 years because ... I felt involved in the fight against AIDS."



Coumba Kouyate-Gbane, a Retro-CI lab technician, prepares HIV samples to conduct CD4 counts.

News in Brief

JSI has **rehabilitated a district incinerator** in Sassandra under the Making Medical Injections Safer (MMIS) Project. This incinerator is now functional and will improve waste management of sharps and other infectious medical waste throughout the district.



Incinerator operator for the district of Sassandra burns used syringes.

Experts from CDC/PEPFAR, WHO, UNICEF, and other agencies gathered for a **Joint PMTCT Mission** in Côte d'Ivoire to discuss how to improve PMTCT service delivery and scale-up. The mission drafted a series of recommendations, and a report describing their implementation will be distributed.

The Ministry of the Fight Against AIDS and the Ministry of Education have applied for and been granted **new CDC cooperative agreements**, covering three and five years, respectively. The new project periods began September 2008.

The Ministry of Family, Women, and Social Affairs (MFFAS) has just launched its **new Web site**, which includes information in areas such as gender and vulnerable populations. Check it out at: www.famille.gouv.ci.

JHU/CCP conducted an official screening of

Bearers of Life, a film bringing messages of hope to seropositive women and addressing issues of prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission.

The deadlines for the **COP submission and the APR** are Nov. 14 and 15, 2008. We're almost there!

A **national OVC situational analysis**, presented in September, is the first step in coordinating care and support activities for OVC and has allowed for a better understanding of factors that contribute to their vulnerability.

A month-long **photo exhibit** drew visitors to the US Embassy to see images of PEPFAR-supported activities and beneficiaries by photographer Nadia Bettega.

Contribute to PEPtalk!

Do you have a news item, a story idea, a good photo, an insightful commentary on an important issue? Share it. Send it to us at peptalk@ci.cdc.gov. Please include your name, affiliation, and contact information.

Contributors to PEPtalk No. 4:

Joan-Luis Njampo, FHI country team, Lenaud Cisse Edwige, Albert Gnapa, Dotara Mathias Soro, Ernest Koffi, Jamila Aboulhab, Djeneba Traore Coulibaly, Versha Patel, Brian Howard

Comings & Goings



New USAID Senior Program Manager, **Carol Payne**



New OVC Technical Adviser at FHI, **BOA II Louis Auguste Pierre Marie**



Wanted: PEPFAR Highly Vulnerable Populations Technical Adviser