

Opening Remarks
Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
Celebrating the Creation of a Center of Excellence
April 19, 2013
Georgetown Public Hospital, Georgetown Guyana

I am very pleased to be here this morning to recognize a milestone in our partnership with Guyana and with the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). This event comes just one month ahead of the May 27th, ten-year anniversary of when then-President Bush signed into law the U.S. Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act of 2003 (or the Global AIDS Act), authorizing establishment of PEPFAR.

Guyana was one of the 15 initial focus countries under the original program. Our Embassy's engagement over the past decade through the efforts of the Department of State, USAID, the Centers for Disease Control, the Department of Defense, and the Peace Corps has been robust, and the United States Government's investment substantial.

Together with the Ministry of Health and a broad range of civil society entities, we have formed a strong and enduring public health partnership.

The initial period from 2004 to 2008 focused on establishing and scaling up prevention, care and treatment programmes for HIV.

PEPFAR called for immediate, comprehensive and evidence-based action to turn the tide of global HIV/AIDS. During this period, the aim of the initiative globally was to treat more than two million HIV-infected people with effective combination anti-retroviral therapy (ART) by 2008; care for ten million HIV-infected and affected persons, including those orphaned by HIV/AIDS also by 2008; and prevent seven million infections by 2010.

Under those broad objectives, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) worked with host countries and other key partners to assess the needs of each country and design a customized program of assistance that fit within the host nation's strategic health plan. As part of a collective national response, the Emergency Plan

goals specific to Guyana were to treat at least 2,000 HIV-infected individuals; to care for 9,000 HIV-affected individuals, including orphans; and to prevent at least 14,000 new infections.

In 2007 a cooperative agreement was awarded to Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. The purpose of this agreement was to support the response to Guyana's national HIV/AIDS epidemic through the development of expertise at the national level that could provide the highest level of care and treatment for persons with AIDS. This would be achieved through the creation of a Center of Excellence for in-patient care of persons with AIDS within a tertiary health-care setting such as the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. The goals and priorities included: improving the care and treatment of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and related opportunistic infections by improving STD management; enhancing the care and treatment of opportunistic infections, including tuberculosis (TB); and initiating programs to provide anti-retroviral therapy (ART).

Over the years support was given to conduct the following activities:

1. Provision of anti-retroviral (ARV) and opportunistic-infection (OI) treatment and any other treatment indicated to approximately 400 patients annually with a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS and who needed hospitalization.
2. Provision of a state-of-the art, in-patient treatment unit for persons with AIDS that includes appropriate staffing, equipment, supplies for treatment, and training.
3. Provision of an incentive package for staff aimed at improving their skills and at increasing staff retention on the unit.
4. Development and provision of training programs and continuing-education programs for health-care professionals, including physicians, registrars, medical students, all categories of nursing personnel and support to the unit's ancillary staff.
5. Development of standard operating procedures for medical care; patient monitoring and discharge; confidential, routine HIV

counseling and testing; and management of infectious and hazardous materials.

6. Opportunities for training of medical staff from other governmental institutions, including: The Georgetown Chest Clinic; UN Volunteer physicians who provided HIV care and treatment in several of the regional and district hospitals in Guyana; and Guyanese physicians who were trained in Cuba and clinically mentored in HIV management by FXB Guyana (with PEPFAR support) after the completion of their Cuba-based training.
7. Development and implementation of a system to monitor and evaluate patient care, training outcomes, and identification of areas for improvement.

This agreement provided opportunities for the Center of Excellence to care for patients diagnosed with either HIV/AIDS or suspected and confirmed cases of active tuberculosis disease, who were admitted to GPHC through a multidisciplinary team including an Infectious Disease Specialist. Machines and equipment necessary for

aiding the diagnosis and management of patients with HIV and other co-morbidities were procured to strengthen the GPHC.

We have also made improvements in the accommodations for patients admitted to the Infectious Disease Ward of the hospital. Through this agreement, a Resource Centre was established that has been and continues to be used for training to enhance the knowledge and skills of health care providers.

So, together, we have achieved some impressive advances. I would like to congratulate everyone who has worked diligently in establishing this Center for Excellence. You can be proud, both of the lives you have saved and the improvement in the quality of life that you helped make possible. Our challenge now is to ensure that this investment is sustained as we move forward to the next phase of our PEPFAR engagement. I thank you for joining us in marking this important milestone today.