World TB Day highlights successes and challenges in the fight against the No. 1 killer of people with HIV. Please see “News in Brief” on Page 2.

For more on the national response to HIV: www.mlsida.gouv.ci

New horizons

‘I started to realize that I mattered’

Djakaridja was 11 when his mother, widowed and HIV-positive, sent her four sons to live with an uncle in Abobo, a high-density suburb of Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire.

“Except for a place to sleep and supper, we had to fend for ourselves,” Djakaridja recalls. “I started collecting bottles and scrap metal to resell, I worked on a mini-bus. … I ran with a group of friends that did bad things — we even stole …”

None of the boys was attending school. Sidibe Minata, who had harbored high hopes for her eldest son, started to fear his influence on his younger brothers.

“I knew that my attitude was really affecting my mother and making her sick, but I didn’t know how to stop,” Djakaridja says.

During this dark time, visits by social workers from PEPFAR partner AVSI offered a ray of light. AVSI provides care and support for 5,400 orphans and vulnerable children, as well as capacity building for government social centers and local community-based organizations.

“It was like a miracle — they listen to me and give me advice,” says Djakaridja, who started hanging out at the AVSI office and joining 250 other kids for educational and recreational activities on Wednesdays and Saturdays. “I started to realize that I mattered, my family and I.”

Through AVSI, the family has obtained access to schooling, health care, and income generating activity. Djakaridja’s dream started coming true when he was able to register for a residential training program in metal work.

“I’m taking a new path in life, so that later I can help my mother and my brothers,” the 15-year-old says. “I won’t be a cause of worry for them anymore, and my old friends want to follow my example.”

“Today,” says his mother, “I am proud of my first-born son.”

HIV fear blocks blood donation, CNTS finds

With PEPFAR support, the National Blood Transfusion Service (CNTS) of Côte d’Ivoire is meeting the challenge of providing safe blood products by screening 100% of collected blood for HIV as well as hepatitis B and C and syphilis.

But to ensure adequate supplies of safe blood for a population of 20 million, the CNTS must go far beyond the laboratory to identify and address factors that motivate individuals to give or not to give blood. When researchers surveyed more than 2,400 donors (19%) and non-donors (82%) about their knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) regarding blood donation, they got some astonishing answers.

“The major barrier to giving blood in Côte d’Ivoire,” concluded CNTS Director Dr. Séidou Konaté, “remains the fear of knowing one’s HIV status.”

The CNTS collects, tests, and distributes products from more than 120,000 units of blood collected annually. But despite donor clubs, volunteer community educators, and frequent donation campaigns, the number of regular blood donors (those who give at least twice a year) still falls short. While the number of donations has increased each year, the CNTS still needs about 54,000 additional blood units per year to cover national needs.

The KAP study results will help the CNTS refine donor recruitment campaigns and mobilization efforts, create educational tools to debunk myths about donation, and define strategies for strengthening linkages between blood donation and HIV counseling and testing.

Survey results, which were compiled and analyzed in January 2010, will be available in July.

On the move

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World TB Day: Hundreds of officials and activists gathered for the national observance of the 15th World TB Day (March 24) in Dabou, under the theme “On the Move Against TB: Let’s Innovate to Act More Quickly.” In a speech, CDC Country Director Dr. Anna Likos noted the progress of the National TB Program, which as of 2009 had integrated TB/HIV co-infection services at 93 TB diagnostic and care centers and tested more than 70% of TB patients for HIV. With PEPFAR support, seven TB centers were renovated last year, and three Abidjan laboratories (Institut Pasteur, CeDRES, and CAT Adjamé) were strengthened with cutting-edge diagnostic tools and infrastructure upgrades to allow faster and more reliable identification and treatment of TB patients and better testing for drug resistance. Likos pledged PEPFAR’s continuing support for the Ministry of Health and the National TB Program. PEPFAR has contributed about $7 million over five years for TB/HIV activities in Côte d’Ivoire, including $3.35 million allocated for 2010.


Focus on MSM: Formative research is providing insights on men who have sex with men (MSM) in Côte d’Ivoire, a neglected and under-served group considered at high risk of HIV infection. Interviews and focus groups with 32 MSM and eight health service providers in Abidjan were conducted last August in preparation for a larger behavioral and biological study in 2010, both with PEPFAR/CDC under the leadership of the Ministry of AIDS, the Ministry of Health, and the MSM Technical Working Group. Initial findings suggest that MSM are less hidden and feel less stigmatized than in the past and that they interact in social groups that get together for special occasions (birthdays, marriages, parties) and to provide support in the cases of illness or death. Findings suggest that MSM are aware of HIV risks and are in need of health and support services. As a group, MSM participating in the study were single (94%) or divorced and highly educated (53% had completed university); half were unemployed. Study results are informing the design of a more in-depth study of 600 MSM that will focus on behavioral risks and will include HIV testing.

Film of hope: A widowed mother near death, her sister desperately seeking cash for yet another traditional healer, her brother ready to send her to the village to die. That’s the scene in Adjara, l’Espoir (Hope), a new film from PEPFAR partner Johns Hopkins University’s Center for Communication Programs (JHU/CCP). Released in March, the film focuses on the intervention of an HIV-positive neighbor and a community counselor, who accompany Adjara for HIV testing and counseling and antiretroviral treatment. The film emphasizes the importance of support (from community counselors, family, and peer support groups), the availability and efficacy of appropriate medical care, and the critical link between health facility and community. Adjara is intended for general distribution as well as targeted use in health facilities and with community-based activities.

Wives in action: The Association of Military Wives of Côte d’Ivoire (AEMC) is expanding its activities to promote HIV prevention nationwide. While the uniformed forces benefit from prevention, treatment, and care activities by PEPFAR partner PSI, the spouses’ association is working with community and youth leaders to develop awareness sessions for children and spouses, strengthen parent-child communication to prevent risky behavior among youth, strengthen psychosocial support for spouses infected or affected by HIV, and promote HIV testing.

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JHU/CCP is also restarting its media campaign to promote parent-child communication, with billboards and TV ads every night in April and May. Community-based activities, starting in May, will focus on helping parents and children talk about sexuality and other sensitive topics.

OVC quality: Côte d’Ivoire’s National OVC Program (PNOEV) in February launched a quality improvement (QI) process to ensure that services make a meaningful and measurable difference in the lives of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and their families.

The launch follows elaboration of national service quality standards (2008) and the training of 90 QI “coaches” from social centers, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the PNOEV, and PEPFAR partners working in four pilot sites (San Pedro, Yamoussoukro, Bouaké, and Yopougon).

The pilot phase, supported by PEPFAR and its partner URC, is intended to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of the quality standards and to refine implementation strategies. Community-based organizations have received coaching to help them establish QI teams and define action plans for piloting the quality standards.

Comings & No Goings

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