

The Trend of Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Hong Kong in the Year 2000 and After. Where Do We Stand?

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) go in parallel with human civilization and are forever evolving. According to the statistics of Social Hygiene Service (SHS), Non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU) and Non-specific genital infection (NSGI) have greatly outnumbered gonorrhoea in recent years and headed all STD new cases. NGU and NSGI are conditions difficult to perceive because an exact aetiological agent is often not found, and treatment in these cases can only be 'target blind'. Hopefully, future microbiological researches would lead to a better understanding of their aetiopathogenesis. Whilst NGU and NSGI are increasing, gonorrhoea is declining, thanks to the effective treatments. Unfortunately, *N. gonorrhoeae* has evolved into an infection with less symptoms thereby facilitating its spread and delaying the diagnosis and treatment. The situation in Mainland is worsened by the easy access to and uncontrolled use of antibiotics including spectinomycin, causing rapid emergence of antibiotic resistance in gonorrhoea. Although our situation is less fragile, strict control and wise use of antibiotics are important in delaying antibiotic resistance. In contrast to gonorrhoea, penicillin is still effective for syphilis. However, a 14.7 times' increase of primary syphilis since 1991 was noted in the SHS statistics, and there were data suggesting that the upsurge was due to a core of syphilis carriers in Mainland. An in-depth analysis on this issue is addressed by Dr. K.H. Lau in "Syphilis: fighting the disease into the new millennium".

The emerging medicosocial significance of viral STDs like genital warts and genital herpes is a real threat for reasons as follows. Firstly, the long incubation period as in Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection, and the presence of subclinical state (HPV and Herpes Simplex infections) facilitate their spread. Secondly, they are not curable and their course is chronic and relapse-prone, and treatment efficacy is not satisfactory

even with modern antiviral drugs. Thirdly, HPV have oncogenic potentials, and lastly, like other genital ulcerative diseases, herpes also facilitates HIV transmission. Effective vaccines, when available, might provide a grain of hope.

The total new STD cases recorded by SHS showed an increase of 2.15 times from 1991 to 1998. It is likely that in the early next century the rising trend will continue. Advanced technology contributes to a super management of STDs but mere reliance on advanced medical facilities would stretch our diminishing finance. Since more than two-thirds of STDs are contracted from the Mainland, successful STD control would very much depend on close collaboration between the health authorities concerned. STDs are infectious and a combat by primary prevention is most cost-effective. The male condom can protect against STDs including HIV infection, but surprisingly a questionnaire survey analysed by Dr. K.Y. Chow had revealed that about 30% of male STD clinic attendees had never used condoms for casual sex in the preceding three months. This highlights the urgency of a comprehensive education on prevention. A preventive programme like that implemented in Thailand in 1989 would be effective but compulsory use of condoms is not in line with the liberal ideas widely accepted here. Nevertheless, feasible and effective primary preventive programmes should be set up. This aims to collect and keep up-to-date health statistics on STDs, to provide regular and updated lectures and workshops to allied health care workers, and to give talks on sexual health and prevention of STDs to people at risk, school students and the general public alike. Hopefully, the STDs could be better controlled in the next millennium.

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