

HIV/AIDS BULLETIN

SPLA HIV/AIDS Bulletin

March 2007 Edition

Introduction

By Dr. Tom Boo

Team Leader CDC Sudan Program

HIV is an important threat to the men, women and families of the SPLA, and so to the nation. Leading the fight against it in the Army is the SPLA HIV Secretariat at General Headquarters in Juba. The HIV Secretariat works closely with the Chief of Staff, the Southern Sudan AIDS Commission, the SPLA Medical Corps, the SPLA Directorate of Research

Did You Know?

VCT means...

Voluntary Counselling & Testing for HIV.

VCT is a service where an individual decides on his/her own will to go for confidential discussions with a counselor on issues related to his/her HIV status. VCT is for couples (a man and his wife or wives), families and single individuals

Why VCT?

HIV testing is part of the fight against the virus threat. Knowing your HIV status helps you protect yourself and others, including your family. Testing is the **only way** to know if you or partner or partners have HIV.

Meaning Of Results

Results can be positive or negative

- **Negative results** means that the test has not detected (found) the antibodies (soldiers) that fight HIV virus in your body meaning you do not have the HIV.
- **Positive results** means that the test has detected (found) the antibodies (soldiers) that fight the HIV virus in your body meaning you have the HIV virus.

Most people who go for testing are **HIV negative**, and the counselling helps them learn how to keep their family safe from HIV. In VCT, people are also given education on safer sexual practices such as the use of condoms to avoid HIV infection.

Some people are positive. A man or woman who **finds out in time** that he or she is

HIV positive can stop the spread to his wife or her husband or sexual partners and the family. There is **no cure** for HIV but there is treatment (medicines that help an HIV positive person stay healthy). The SPLA leadership will work hard to be able to care for soldiers and families who have HIV. With proper care and support, military personnel with HIV will remain healthy and fit for duty for many years. HIV testing is the only way to know if a person or a family needs medical care or other support for HIV. SPLA commanders at different levels have an important role to play in supporting HIV+ military personnel.



Cutting the ribbon at the Mess 40 VCT Centre's opening; (from left to right) Major John, Major General Hoth, and Major James Wal.

Opening of the SPLA VCT Centre in Juba at the Mess 40 Barracks

The first SPLA VCT centre in Juba located at the Mess 40 Barracks was opened on February 20th 2007. The VCT was opened by Major General James Hoth, Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics standing in for the SPLA Chief of Staff. The VCT centre has 4 SPLA soldiers trained and qualified as VCT counsellors. The centre is opened five days a week, Monday – Friday, 8am to 3pm. VCT services at the MESS 40 barracks are **FREE** and available to the SPLA and their families.

In the next issue of the HIV/AIDS bulletin:

- Facts on sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Collaboration with the SPLA Medical Corps
- The training and graduation of 27 HIV/AIDS Educators and Focal persons plus 30 peer educators.



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(continued) Another SPLA VCT will be opening in April 2007 in Nimule at the Papa 91 training centre.

VCT is also available free in Juba Teaching Hospital, Nimule Hospital, Yei (St. Bakhita's and Yei Civil Hospital), Lainya, Morobo, Maridi, Yambio, Nzara, Lui, Rumbek, Boma.



SPLA commanders attending an HIV/AIDS lecture, part of an 8 week military course at Malou School of Infantry.

The Need for Concerted Efforts to Combat HIV/AIDS

By Lt. Col Africano Mande

Head of Research Department, Directorate of Training and Research

Within the SPLA, just like in other places, soldiers could be at a higher risk to HIV infection. War conditions such as chronic stress, hunger, bad weather, separation from families, seclusions in other forms, violence and the actual combat situations have left our soldiers vulnerable to all sorts of scourges such as alcoholism and psychosocial trauma, factors that increase the soldiers' vulnerability to HIV infection.

No doubt today, the AIDS pandemic has become more and more apparent among us and we have already witnessed Comrades dying from HIV/AIDS. In the past, humanitarian and development actors have often discriminated against the SPLA and left them out as beneficiaries in HIV/AIDS prevention programs. It's now different. Firstly, top SPLA military leaders have pronounced their will and commitment to combat HIV/AIDS within the SPLA. Secondly, development partners such as IntraHealth and PSI and the militaries of

Kenya and Uganda are supporting the SPLA HIV/AIDS prevention efforts through the SPLA HIV Secretariat. Comrades the questions I am now raising are these;

- What are we doing at the operational and tactical levels to combat HIV/AIDS in the SPLA?
- Have we earmarked specific budget lines for HIV/AIDS prevention as Directorates and Corps?
- Have we developed operational policy positions on the war against HIV/AIDS?

The Directorate of Training and Research is already taking lead. The Research Department has concluded a Knowledge, Attitude, practice and Behaviour (KAPB) survey which will act as a prelude toward the development of multi-dimensional and sectoral strategies to fight HIV/AIDS in the SPLA. On the whole, "let us readjust our time, plans and resources to fight this new but elusive enemy HIV/AIDS".

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