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The 100% Condom Program: Part B

This case is the sequel to “HIV in Thailand: The 100% Condom Program.”

Going National

In February 1991 at a medical conference in Chiang Rai, Dr. Wiwat Rojanapithayakorn, a regional director for the Thai Ministry of Health's Center for Disease Control, moderated a panel on the socio-economic consequences of AIDS. Dr. Uthai Sudsukh, Wiwat's former supervisor and the current Ministry of Public Health permanent secretary, was in the audience. Wiwat seized the opportunity. He rushed the panel and then presented the 100% Condom Program he had launched in 1989. A longtime advocate of prevention programs, Uthai liked Wiwat's program and promised that when Wiwat returned to Bangkok, he would try to help.

Dr. Uthai created a working group to study the feasibility of national expansion and appointed Wiwat a member. The group recommended taking the idea to the National AIDS Committee (NAC). Anticipating opposition, Wiwat organized a group to lobby NAC. New data showing increased HIV rates triggered a sense of urgency. On July 18, 1991, in a meeting of the permanent secretaries on the NAC, the permanent secretaries agreed to endorse the program if presented to the NAC.¹

One month later, on August 14, 1991, the NAC, chaired by Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, passed the following resolution:

In the campaign for sex establishments to have 100% condom use and for sex workers to always use condoms with customers, at this meeting we resolve that the governor, provincial chief of police, and the provincial health officer of each province will work together to enforce a condom-use only policy that requires all commercial sex workers to use condoms with every customer.²

Sarun Charumilind, Sachin Jain, and Joseph Rhatigan prepared this case for the purposes of classroom discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective health care delivery practice.

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Three months later, there was little progress in the provinces. Wiwat called upon Uthai's help again. On November 12, 1991, at a national meeting of provincial health directors, Wiwat slipped a note to Uthai to include in his opening speech – a bold move for a junior staff member. In the note, Wiwat wrote, "On the 14th of August, the National AIDS Committee produced a resolution requiring all provinces to implement the 100% Condom Program. Therefore, I would like to request that everyone implement the program by February 1992 and report your progress to me every three months."³

When Uthai opened the conference, he improved upon Wiwat's version, stating, "I would like to request that everyone implement the program by the end of the year as a New Year's gift to the Thai people and report your progress to me every three months."³

Within months, almost all of the provinces were implementing the program.

Implementation in Bangkok

By March 1992, every province except Bangkok, the largest province with nearly 6 million residents, was implementing the 100% Condom Program.⁴ Hundreds of sex businesses were scattered across the city. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration invited Wiwat to help. He used the strategy that he had used elsewhere, bringing business leaders together for meetings to get universal consent. Senator Mechai Viravaidya, the well-known minister and visible leader of the AIDS media campaign, gave the opening speech. Within a month, the Bangkok effort was underway.²

The Program's Impact

The budget for HIV/AIDS rose from USD 7.3 million in 1991 to USD 82 million in 1997.⁵ Approximately USD 1.55 million was invested in condoms, averting an estimated USD 1.8 million in spending on STI medications, in addition to treatment for opportunistic infections and lifelong antiretroviral therapy.⁶ Condoms were added to the Medical Device Act, which meant they had to be approved, licensed, and meet quality standards, and the Ministry of Industry helped regulate quality.

Since Dr. Wiwat's arrival in Ratchaburi, it had taken two and a half years to roll out the 100% Condom Program to every province.⁷ Multiple data sources – behavioural surveys, condom sales, STI trends, and HIV surveillance – were used to demonstrate the program's impact. Condom use in direct sex workers increased from 25% in June 1989 to 93% in 1992.^{1,8} By 1992, 60 million free condoms were being distributed each year.⁹ The annual number of STI cases plunged from nearly 400,000 in 1989 to 120,000 in 1992 and 15,000 in 2001.¹⁰ From 1989 to 1995, government clinics saw an estimated 260,000 fewer STIs per year, and private clinics and pharmacies were saved four times that number of patient visits.⁶ In army recruits, HIV prevalence peaked at 4% in 1993, declined thereafter, and was less than 0.5% by 2000.¹¹ By 1993, 28.0% of direct sex workers and 7.6% of indirect sex workers were HIV-infected.¹² Over the course of the next decade, prevalence progressively fell; by 2004, prevalence was 7.4% in direct sex workers and 4.0% in indirect sex workers.¹

Statistical models projected the number of HIV infections avoided due to the 100% Condom Program. For example, a 2000 World Bank review calculated that 200,000 infections had been prevented as a result of the program.¹³ Another model developed in 1996 estimated that this figure was closer to 2 million.¹⁴ In 2004 Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra estimated that 5 million infections had been prevented.^{15, 16}

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