

AKZIA, December 2004

From the Editor

We decided not to dedicate the first December publication to New Year's. What can we say? There is no point in summing up the results. Everyone has his own results.

We decided not to dedicate the first December publication to Ukraine. The Ukrainians can resolve their problems without the participation of Russia, can't they? Ukraine is not part of Russia but an independent state. Yushenko or Yanukovich, each of them solves his problems and Ukrainians have their right to decide, even if their decision is not in favor of Russia.

We dedicated the first publication to the HIV/AIDS problem, and not because the World HIV/AIDS Day was on December 1. We are writing about HIV/AIDS because very few people believe that the disease can affect them or their families. And if the problem is not related to you and your relatives, you know virtually nothing about it except the fact that HIV/AIDS is a contagious and deadly disease. You do not know that in order to survive an HIV-positive person needs to earn at least a thousand US dollars a month or else he will not have money to buy medicine. And if there is no money to buy the medicine, he will not live through the year. Do you know that the state is in no hurry to solve the problems of HIV-positive people? Do you know that we are in no hurry to realize the problems of the HIV-positive? However, in spite of everything these people live and struggle for their right to live while everyone shouts "We are against AIDS" or "It's time to live". I wish the time to live would really come and not only for the healthy and rich. **Svetlana Maximchenko, Editor in Chief**

TIME TO LIVE?

There are only two of such days a year: every third Sunday of May and December 1. Twice a year 39.4 million people living with HIV, according to the UNAIDS data, are in the center of public attention. They are shown on TV, interviewed; their stories are published on the front pages of newspapers and broadcast on the radio. In Russia, HIV-positive people have struggled too long for the right to be heard and be broadcast on TV and for the HIV issue to be discussed in public, and the epidemic had to assume such a scale when it is simply impossible to disregard it.

There is no guarantee that you give a hand to an HIV-positive person or let him/her kiss you on the cheek. There is no guarantee that you will sterilize the dishes after an HIV-positive person either. This is the reason why people living with HIV put on masks before they speak on television or have their picture taken. There are exceptions, however.

Severe frost and wind on the Gorbaty Bridge in front of the Residence of the Russian Government. There are young people there. They are laughing and joking. They are holding MAI flags and banners with a red ribbon. December 1.

"No to AIDS but we will die of the frost", says a guy in a baseball cap with a red ribbon. There are reporters and journalists all around. About a dozen policemen are protecting this little but loud rally. The rally participants brought 3 cardboard monkeys that are holding hands over their ears: the first one stands for the government, the second one – for the State Duma, the third one – for the President. Television cameras are targeted towards the self-made banners that read "Our Deaths are Your Disgrace".

5 months ago we nearly died of swelter on Bolotnaya Square on the Commemoration Day for Those Who Died of AIDS together with these students who are now suffering from the frost on the Gorbaty Bridge. They got some credits for coming then. Of course, they are against AIDS even though they think that the problem of HIV is of no concern to them. Unfortunately it is not the case. According to some estimates 10% of the students are HIV-positive.

“Protest is when I make a statement that I disagree with something. Resistance is when I act in order to stop the existence of something I disagree with”.

Unknown Afro-American

Times of Afro-Americans’ struggle for their rights.

You think that HIV is a deadly virus, for which there is no cure, don’t you? You are wrong. HIV is not a deadly virus and there is a cure for it. This cure is money and not some special vaccine. It does not exist because the virus modifies too rapidly, and researchers with their scientific developments just can not keep up with its modifications. It means that you can not get cured from immunodeficiency syndrome but you can live with it however long provided you take medicine. This medicine is called anti-retroviral (ARV). There are a few of them, and the treatment scheme is customized for each person. The common thing is that the ARV treatment course is extremely rigid for because lives depend on it. You can not miss the time of taking the medicine – otherwise your body gets used to a certain medicine and a new treatment scheme is needed.

It is difficult to do it for HIV-positive Russians as in Russia, where the growth rate that is close to that of Africa, and the number of HIV-positive people might exceed 2.5 million people by 2008, only one ARV medicine is produced. It is called AZT. All other medicine is imported from abroad and costs money. These patented medicines are overly expensive. On average, an ARV treatment course for one person costs 8-10 thousand US dollars per year. If you are a diabetic, you get insulin from the state that pays for it. This is stipulated in the constitution, which guarantees the right to live to all the citizens of the country. Russia can afford insulin but cannot afford ARV. Therefore, HIV-positive people struggle with the state for their right to live. There is enough money to make war and double the GDP too, most probably but there is not enough money to help people survive because if they do not receive treatment, they will die.

Valery Panyushkin, a journalist, who writes reports about the problems of the HIV-positive people, made a simple calculation. If we proceed from the fact that the federal budget allocates 118 million roubles for combating AIDS annually, it totals up to 4 US dollars per person. The support that is guaranteed for everyone reaches only some. Do you know that decisions on ARV treatment

Generation Free of AIDS

On December 1 the results of the “Generation Free of AIDS”, the first All-Russian competition for the young were summed up. The winners are:

2005 Best Informational Campaign for the Young – Sergey Andronov, Arsamas, “Control Your Safety” info-project;

Best creative project on the topic of HIV prevention, – Victor Pavlov, Alexey Praprin, Dzerzhinsk, “Your Freedoms”;

Best idea for a drawing, sketch, or a draft symbol for combating HIV/AIDS – Sergey Mshviladze, Moscow, “Draw the Problem”;

The winners were awarded free annual subscriptions to the @kzia newspaper. The project by Irina Karpova, who staged a play “HIV+ or Body in Action” for the competition, received a special prize of the jury. More information is available at www.nospid.ru

are made by special medical boards that are guided by such criteria as the “social reliability” and “prospects” of the patient? So if you got infected but did not appear trustworthy to the special medical board doctor, you will not get medicines and may die. The name for this is state genocide.

Local genocide is when everyone in a small town knows that, say, Lena is HIV-positive. Lena can not get a haircut at the barber’s, go to the café, and, for some reason, the people prefer not to say hello to her. For some reason, in a country, where the number of HIV-positive people is rapidly increasing, no one thinks that the problem can affect him or her.

According to the UNAIDS data the HIV epidemic is spreading in Russia faster than in any other European country. The Russian Federation accounts for 70% of HIV carriers who are officially registered in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. According to UNAIDS the number of HIV-positive people residing in Russia was 860000. Women get infected more and more. 80% of those 860000 people are women, 0.5% of pregnant women are HIV-positive. It looks like a large-scale epidemic. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) when the number of HIV-positive pregnant women reaches 1%, the spread of the virus will be out of control. According to the Federal Center of Science and Methodology for AIDS Protection the percentage of HIV transmission by a heterosexual contact increased from 4.6% to 17.6% in the last three years. It means that if this trend keeps, the injection drug users, who account for the majority of the HIV-positive people now, will be in the minority.

At present, the HIV-positive people in Russia struggle not with death but with the state that dooms them to death with its indifference. When the number of the HIV-positive people increases even more, the relations between them and the state, on the one hand, and the HIV-negative, on the other, may turn into a civil war. In order to prevent this it is essential that the state is opposed so that it increases treatment availability, introduces a glasnost policy, and takes heed of the real numbers and not those forged by the officials. Right now there are a very small number of HIV activists struggling with the government. They are those who are not afraid to speak in front of cameras with an

Mathematics of Life

It is next to impossible to calculate the price of keeping one HIV-positive person alive for a year. There are a great number of different treatment courses and hundreds of medicines, which may amount up to a larger or smaller number. The approximate average, however, remains the same. For instance, there is an annual treatment course using 2 medicines: Efavirenz (Sustiva) and Combivir (Lamivudine + Zidovudine). Dosage regimen: Efavirenz – 3 pills a day (\$4.15 per pill), Combivir – 2 pills a day (\$8.21 per pill) plus the side effects treatment – starting from \$50 a month. The total amount is over \$10,000 a year.

Protection is the only solution

The number of HIV transmission cases by means of sexual contacts is skyrocketing. According to the World Health Organization and UNAIDS data 70-80% of all HIV cases are through sexual contacts. A condom remains the only effective means of protection. HIV transmits only through certain body liquids (blood, lymphatic fluid, and sperm) if a condom is hermetic, then the virus will not “steal through it”. Even though there are a great variety of condoms, not all of them are equally effective. Under the national standard if 3 condoms out of 80 tested failed the test (broke or not hermetic), the lot is considered to be acceptable. In order not to get one of those three you have to bear in mind that:

- The chances of getting torn are considerably higher for extra thin condoms;
- Textured condoms (ribs or dots) are also in the risk group for any irregularity increases the possibility of breaking;
- Condoms with spermicidal lubrication the possibility of getting pregnant is lower as the lubricant kills and slows down part of sperm cells. It is in no way related to HIV transmission, however. WHO tests revealed that spermicides destroy genital epithelial cells and the possibility of getting infected becomes even higher. In addition, the lengthy exposure of the latex film to spermicides leads to a greater possibility of its damage;
- Anesthetic condoms the latex film is subject to greater damage, and the combination of an anesthetic and ribs or dots increases the danger. So a regular lubricated condom is the best protection.

The information is provided by the “Medcom-M” company, distributor of CONTEX and LIFESTYLES.

open face and under their real names. These people actively struggle for treatment availability and pursue their major goal, which is legalizing the so-called generics. Generics are analogs of those expensive medicines even though they are not patented. They are 10 times less expensive than the patented ones, and if they were produced in Russia an annual ARV treatment course per person would cost 100 to 300 US dollars. The fact of the matter is that producing generics is unprofitable to Russia. It is also unprofitable to those large pharmaceutical companies that produce patented medicines since if non-patented medicines were produced locally; they would not be able to sell their products any more. Meanwhile, everyone may suddenly become HIV-positive. So if we do not treat HIV-positive people, who potentially may be all of us, we will die. You would not want to die, would you?

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