



Keynote Lecture 4

Update on the HIV/AIDS pandemic

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The year 2006 marked the 25th anniversary of the first description of AIDS cases. In these 25 years, HIV/AIDS has relentlessly progressed from a handful of cases in select areas and populations to affect every region and country in the world.

The number of people living with HIV continues to increase in every region in the world. The latest report from the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates the total number of people in the world living with HIV to be approximately 40 million. Over 4 million of these people acquired their infection in 2006. An estimated 25 million have died due to AIDS, 3 million in 2006 alone. More than 90% of all people living with HIV reside in developing countries where resources for diagnosis, prevention, and management of diseases are scarce.

Global and national commitments to halt and reverse the HIV/AIDS global pandemic have been professed and declared. While much of the milestones and targets specified in these declarations and commitments have not been achieved, important progress has been made. The level of political commitment, availability of resources, and domestic public expenditure in developing countries is much higher than at any time since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. Efforts to provide and expand access to treatment continue in full swing. While the goal of the 3 by 5 initiative, an initiative that had the target of providing ART to 3 million people living with HIV/AIDS in low- and middle-income countries by the end of 2005 has not been met, the number of people receiving combination antiretroviral therapy in developing countries has increased from 400 000 in December 2003 to 1.3 million in December of 2005. Recent results from clinical trials of antiretroviral therapy in resource constrained settings have documented rates of adherence and efficacy that were comparable to results obtained in more affluent developed countries. Progress has also been noted in several prevention activities including the number of people using HIV testing and counseling services, scaling up of PMTCT activities, and expansion of HIV education. However, this progress falls far short of the goals that have been set. Other preventive efforts that hold promise for the future include circumcision, microbicides, and vaccines.

There is an unprecedented momentum in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic. An unprecedented global commitment has been made to work towards universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support. What has previously been thought as insurmountable is now viewed as possible. Significant challenges remain. However, this progress needs to be sustained and amplified.