

Global Health: Asia in the 21st Century

Join us Fridays through April 3 for a five-part series as we take you around the world highlighting global health issues. (There will be no series publication on March 20.)

4

HIV AIDS Awareness and Education in India

By Michelle Morrison

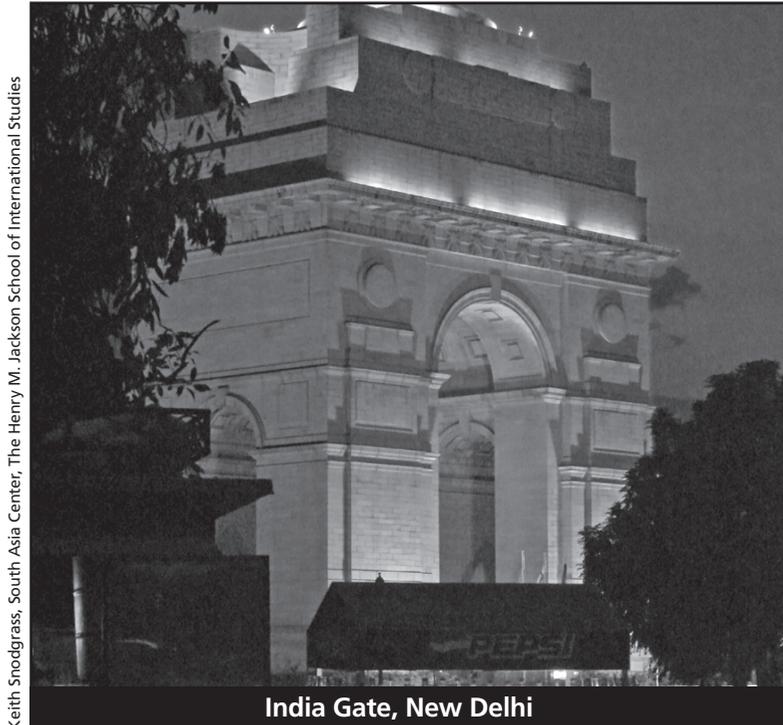
International Training and Education Center on HIV (I-TECH), University of Washington

India currently has the third-largest number of people in the world living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), with estimates of 2 to 3.1 million infected in 2007. This is the population equivalent of the city of Chicago or the entire state of Nevada. While the overall rate of infection is well under 1 percent, this rate varies dramatically by region and state.

Over the years, India has seen HIV move from urban to rural populations and from high-risk groups to the general population, disproportionately affecting women and youth. Sexual transmission accounts for more than 85 percent of transmission; infected blood products, intravenous drug use and perinatal (mother to fetus) transmission account for the remaining 15 percent of transmission.

India responds to a crisis

The government of India has recognized the importance of increasing its response to this epidemic by focusing on creating infrastructure and a trained workforce to increase awareness of transmission and prevention, as well as offering testing, treatment, follow up and counseling for people living with HIV or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).



India Gate, New Delhi

Keith Snodgrass, South Asia Center, The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies

One of the major obstacles to educating people about HIV has been the stigma attached to the disease — this stigma was brought about by the many misconceptions about how it is spread and the proper ways to interact with those infected. The goal of India's education efforts is to create a nonstigmatizing environment. The goal of its treatment efforts will be to enhance access to services for people living with HIV/AIDS in order to reduce the spread of HIV infection and increase India's capacity to respond to HIV/AIDS in the long term. With an estimated 48 physicians and 45 nurses per 100,000 people, the need to increase the trained workforce to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic is a pressing one.

First step: education

Surveys indicate that three-fourths of the Indian population has heard of HIV/AIDS, although this number varies considerably by region and gender. Only 61% of women in India report having heard of HIV. One measure of knowledge about HIV is whether a person can both identify ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV, and reject the major misconceptions about its transmission. The number of young Indians ages 15 to 24 who can do both was less than one in three for men and one in four for women. Men are more likely than women to know how HIV is transmitted and how to keep from getting the disease. One in three men

know that consistent use of condoms helps prevent HIV/AIDS, compared with only one in eight women. This points to the necessity of increased comprehensive HIV education that is integrated at the national, state and district level.

The International Training and Education Center on HIV (I-TECH) is a global HIV/AIDS training program that supports the ongoing development of health-care-worker training systems that are locally determined, optimally resourced, highly responsive and self-sustaining in countries and regions hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic. I-TECH, which is part of the Department of Global Health at the University of Washington, collaborates with the University of California, San Francisco. I-TECH has been working in India since 2003 to equip health workers with enhanced knowledge and skills to care for people with HIV.

Next:

Overcoming the World's (Dietary) Energy Glut: Incorporating the Nutrition Transition into MDG 1

EXPAND YOUR WORLD

- 1) What is one of the main obstacles to educating people in India about HIV?
- 2) What is one of the main obstacles to treating people in India with HIV?
- 3) Why might men be more aware of HIV/AIDS than women?



We're pleased to join The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies in bringing you the five-part series "Global Health: Asia in the 21st Century." Each week we'll highlight an emerging health issue and offer students an opportunity to explore it further through discussion questions. For more information, please visit <http://jsis.washington.edu/earc>.

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