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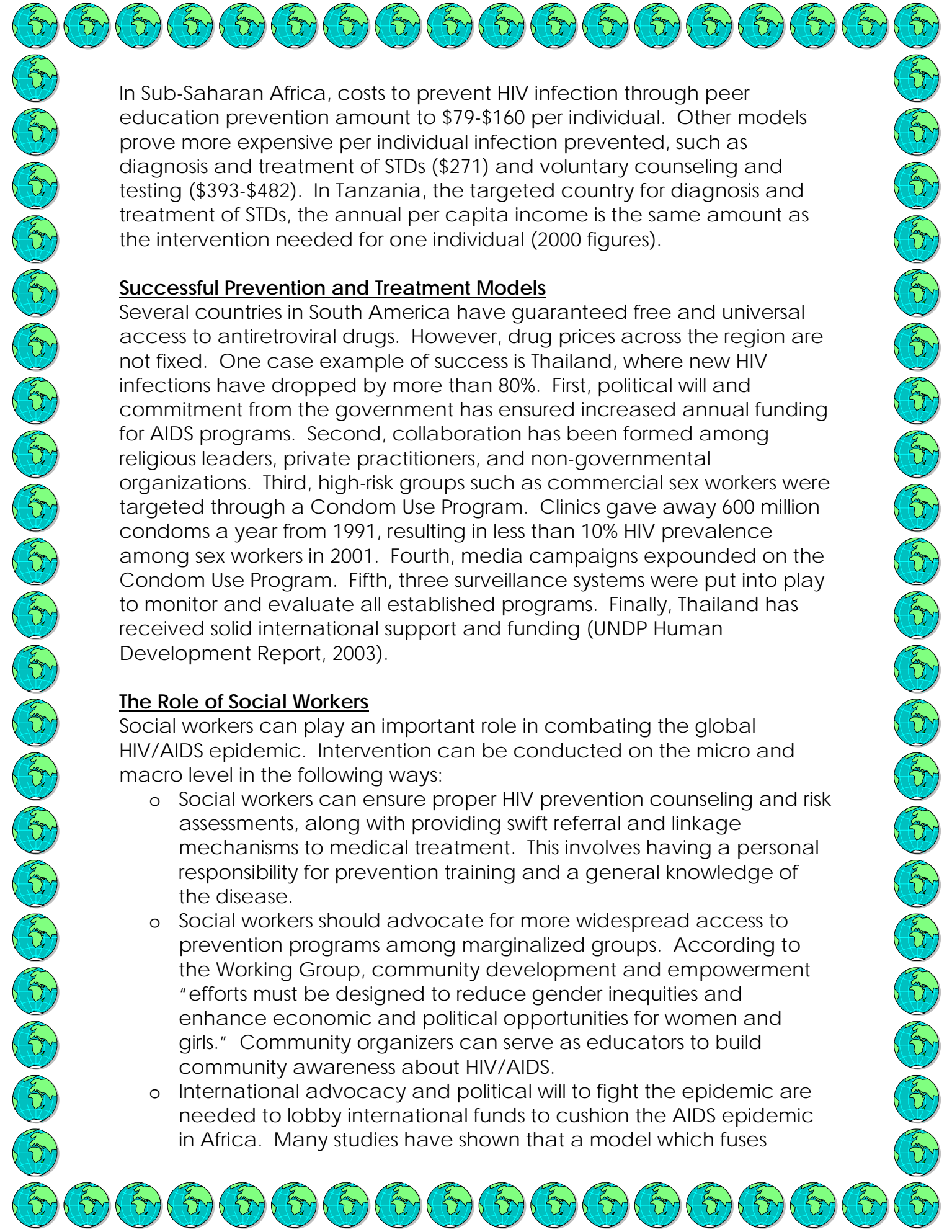
The Global AIDS Epidemic

World AIDS Day is December 1, 2003

There is no doubt that the AIDS epidemic has spread internationally at a rapid rate. According to UNAIDS, 42 million people were living with HIV/AIDS by December 2002. 3.2 million cases were children under age 15. In addition, 5 million people were newly infected with HIV in 2002, and 3.1 million people died of AIDS. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where 8.8% of the adult population between the ages of 15 and 49 are infected with HIV, the main mode of transmission is heterosexual. In this region, there are 29.4 million total cases of HIV/AIDS, including both adults and children. According to the 2003 UNDP Human Development Report, the life expectancies for four African countries, namely Zimbabwe, Botswana, Swaziland, and Lesotho will decrease between 24 and 35 years by the year 2005 as a result of the epidemic. However, HIV/AIDS cases are growing at rapid rates in different parts the world, not just in Africa. China and India are experiencing severe, localized epidemics that are affecting millions of people. In Eastern Europe, many Russian youths are engaging in high-risk behaviors which have caused cases to climb from 10,993 in 1998 to 200,000 by mid-2002. In the Middle East and North Africa, denial among social and political leaders and poor surveillance systems have added to HIV cases in 2002. In high-income countries, different populations are increasingly at risk, such as adolescent females. In Latin America and the Caribbean, several countries have an HIV prevalence of 1%-6%. In the U.S., an estimated 886,575 of individuals were diagnosed with AIDS through 2002. 501,669 individuals have died of AIDS in the U.S. (CDC, 2003). Clearly, prevention and treatment efforts are strongly needed in every region of the world.

Global Funding for Prevention

According to the global HIV Prevention Working Group, HIV prevention efforts in low and middle income countries in 2002 amounted to an estimated \$1.9 billion, which is only one-third of what UNAIDS estimates will be needed annually by 2005 and only 29% of the annual amount required in 2007. The largest funding gap for prevention efforts exists in Asia and the Pacific.



In Sub-Saharan Africa, costs to prevent HIV infection through peer education prevention amount to \$79-\$160 per individual. Other models prove more expensive per individual infection prevented, such as diagnosis and treatment of STDs (\$271) and voluntary counseling and testing (\$393-\$482). In Tanzania, the targeted country for diagnosis and treatment of STDs, the annual per capita income is the same amount as the intervention needed for one individual (2000 figures).


Successful Prevention and Treatment Models

Several countries in South America have guaranteed free and universal access to antiretroviral drugs. However, drug prices across the region are not fixed. One case example of success is Thailand, where new HIV infections have dropped by more than 80%. First, political will and commitment from the government has ensured increased annual funding for AIDS programs. Second, collaboration has been formed among religious leaders, private practitioners, and non-governmental organizations. Third, high-risk groups such as commercial sex workers were targeted through a Condom Use Program. Clinics gave away 600 million condoms a year from 1991, resulting in less than 10% HIV prevalence among sex workers in 2001. Fourth, media campaigns expounded on the Condom Use Program. Fifth, three surveillance systems were put into play to monitor and evaluate all established programs. Finally, Thailand has received solid international support and funding (UNDP Human Development Report, 2003).

The Role of Social Workers

Social workers can play an important role in combating the global HIV/AIDS epidemic. Intervention can be conducted on the micro and macro level in the following ways:

- Social workers can ensure proper HIV prevention counseling and risk assessments, along with providing swift referral and linkage mechanisms to medical treatment. This involves having a personal responsibility for prevention training and a general knowledge of the disease.
- Social workers should advocate for more widespread access to prevention programs among marginalized groups. According to the Working Group, community development and empowerment “efforts must be designed to reduce gender inequities and enhance economic and political opportunities for women and girls.” Community organizers can serve as educators to build community awareness about HIV/AIDS.
- International advocacy and political will to fight the epidemic are needed to lobby international funds to cushion the AIDS epidemic in Africa. Many studies have shown that a model which fuses



educational prevention efforts with highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) is needed to successfully combat the disease. However, such methods can prove costly in some areas. The positive aspect is that nineteen African countries have set up national HIV/AIDS councils or commissions at senior levels of government, and many local communities have engaged in development activities.

For more information, consult the following resources:

UNAIDS, www.unaids.org

UNESCO, <http://portal.unesco.org/aids>

World Health Organization, www.who.org

UNDP Human Development Report 2003. New York: Oxford University Press.

Global HIV Prevention Group 2003. Access to HIV Prevention: Closing the Gap. www.gatesfoundation.org or www.kaisernet.org

Human Rights Watch, www.hrw.org/campaigns/sep/action.htm

Harvard School of Public Health, www.hsph.harvard.edu/bioethics/AIDSPriorities.html

Multicultural HIV/AIDS Alliance of Oregon, www.mhaao.org/activities/cmp.html

Wolf, Michael S. (2002). Preparing social workers to address HIV/AIDS prevention and detection: Implications for professional training and education. *Journal of Community Health*, v. 27. Research article.

Torabi, Mohammad R. et. al. (2000). Evaluation of HIV/AIDS education in Russia using a video approach. *Journal of School Health*, v. 70. Research article.

Journal of International Social Welfare, various articles.