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Recommendations
RECOMMENDATIONS OF SEMINAR ON MASS MEDIA AND AIDS IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA
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Organized by AMIC and Faculty of Public Health Mahidol University
August 17-19, 1994, Bangkok, Thailand

25 participants from Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, Philippines.
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We are a diverse group of journalists, government media practitioners, AIDS activists, and government health officials working in Southeast Asia who met in Bangkok to discuss the media coverage of AIDS in the region, including communications campaigns of governments and non-government organizations.

We agreed that for media coverage of AIDS to be more effective, improvements need to be made in the following areas:

1. Attitude. Many media organizations and practitioners in Southeast Asia don't seem to place enough importance on AIDS, in spite of evidence that it is becoming a world-wide epidemic. Media practitioners generally seem to have a narrow perspective of the problem, neglecting the political, economic, and other non-health implications of what is commonly perceived as a purely public health crisis. They must also become more sensitive to the ethical and cultural values which have an impact on AIDS.

2. Professionalism. To cover AIDS issue more effectively, media practitioners need to develop their professional skills in information-gathering and analysis.

3. Access to information. Media practitioners often lack access to accurate information from technical and institutional sources on a public health crisis in which the only effective response is preventive education.
4. Cooperation. Practitioners need more cooperation from sources who can provide information. Coordination between media and information sources can also improve the dissemination of information and the quality of media coverage.

5. Resources. Without more financial and other resources, media are limited in covering AIDS issues, and distribution of information is constrained.

6. Evaluation. There is little effort to evaluate media campaigns or seek feedback about media information from the public in order to improve coverage and future information efforts.

7. Distribution. There are population groups at risk who still do not receive adequate information about AIDS.

We recommend the following responses to the above deficiencies in media coverage.

1. The perspectives of media practitioners can be broadened with regular workshops and other opportunities for exposure to AIDS issues. Journalism skills can also be upgraded with training opportunities and exchange programs. Training can also address the packaging of information in usable formats and interesting styles.

2. Information disseminators of AIDS information should maintain closer contact with media practitioners to facilitate flow of information.

   In particular, linkages should be formed between media groups in the region and such regional AIDS organizations as APCASO, the Asia-Pacific Council of AIDS Services Organizations (APCASO) and the ASEAN Task Force on AIDS.

   Glossaries and press kits can be prepared to provide timely and convenient information. An inventory of health and media professionals interested in AIDS can be prepared and distributed to encourage collaborations and facilitate information exchanges.

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   The early and continuous involvement of media in planning, research, and evaluation should be encouraged.
3. Government and other sources of funding need to appreciate the magnitude of the crisis, the importance of timely and accurate public information, and the need for resources to enable media to respond to the situation adequately.

4. Media should regularly evaluate their information campaigns or reports so that the feedback from their audiences can contribute to improvements in the quality of media coverage.

5. Distribution can be improved by identifying target groups and tailoring information for those groups more accurately.