

# LOCAL

## National AIDS programme launches media campaign

**"OUCH! It Hurts"**, a new media campaign was launched by the National AIDS Programme in collaboration with the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Tuesday, January 23. This media campaign seeks to tackle two relevant factors that according to health officials have been hindering the progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS around the world, namely, Stigma and Discrimination.

The theme, "Ouch!", was adopted for the campaign since it is the natural human reaction to pain. Thus stressing the point that Stigma and Discrimination do not protect against HIV/AIDS, but rather, it hurts.

Speaking to a gathering of government officials, community leaders as well as young people, H.E. the Governor, Richard Tauwhare referred to statistics that show that in 2006, despite recent advancements in treatment and care, the AIDS epidemic claimed over 3 million lives with a half a million being children.

Some 300,000 persons in the Caribbean are living with HIV/AIDS, according to the Governor, giving the Caribbean the second largest prevalence rate after sub-Saharan Africa.

The key to tackling the disease according to the Governor is the need to be open about a very real crisis.

Under Secretary within the Ministry of Health, Mrs. Susan Malcolm in her remarks emphasized the need for a community spirit in fighting the AIDS battle that has become a world wide epidemic. She went on to further point out the devastating ripple effect that Stigma and Discrimination can have on a society. She noted "Stigma and Discrimination serve only to create barriers to effectively fighting the disease.

It prevents persons from seeking treatment as well as prevents persons from being tested. It encourages rejection and isolation of the affected as



Dr. Ewing

well as instilling fear and denial".

According to Malcolm, the way forward involves a three-prong approach: education, redress and advocacy.

To accomplish this she stressed, "We must come together as a community, as a country, as a region in our fight against the spread of the disease so that we may eventually make an impact throughout the world".

Mr. Clinton Lightbourne, President, People for Positive Action, a group formed to cater to the social and emotional needs of persons who are living with and affected by HIV/AIDS spoke profoundly, noting, "Stigma and discrimination comes from fear and lack of knowledge about the disease and the people who are most affected by it." He went on to point out, "The danger of stigma and discrimination is that it drives the infection underground". Treatment of AIDS/HIV has improved over the years and according to Lightbourne, "More people are now living rather than dying from HIV/AIDS than ever before and it is important to create a non-discriminatory and supporting environment in the family unit, the workplace and indeed the various institutions within the wider society".

In the feature address delivered by Dr. Rufus Ewing, Director of Health Services on the behalf of the Minister of Health, Hon. Floyd Hall, he spoke to the sensitivity that is often felt when

having to deal with issues relating to HIV/AIDS.

He said however, "The challenge then is for us as leaders to direct the discussion on this subject in an open and honest way and to collectively engage our constituents, no matter how difficult or sensitive it may be, in an effort to provoke debate on this issue and I believe that this campaign has the power to do just that."

He too stressed the barrier that stigma and discrimination places in the battle against the disease and urged for partnership in all areas of society. He went on to say, "The fact that stigma still exists is an indication for all of us to begin to decide on how as individu-

als and as members of a community, we can take action to reduce its impact. Indeed the problem of stigmatization itself is one that begins with the way we socialize our children."

On that note he called for concentrated effort to be placed on positive socialization where it concerns children, helping them to understand the nature of the disease and ways in which they can protect themselves without hurting others.

The Ouch campaign is scheduled to run over a six month period and will feature Print Ads, Television and Radio slots that will focus centrally on the issues concerning Stigmatization and Discrimination.



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The Maintenance Department is seeking individual qualified in electrical work and with general construction skills. Fluency in speaking, reading and writing English is a MUST. Good hospitality skills required and be willingness to work holidays and weekends.

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