

# WHAT'S HAPPENING WITHIN THE REGION



## PACIFIC GENERAL

### Education on HIV/AIDS for seafarers

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AIDS has become one of the world's major health problems in just over 20 years, having infected over 50 million people, and killed up to 16 million people to date. In 1998 alone, AIDS killed 2.6 million people and infected another 5.8 million people. 2.9 million of those newly infected were between the ages of 15 and 24 years, while a total of 11.2 million children have been orphaned by AIDS. Just over 2000 people have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in the Pacific Island nations and the infection rate is rising steadily.

Most people who have HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) remain healthy for several years before they develop HIV-related illnesses. They will become more susceptible to infections and illnesses that are normally easily fought off by our immune system, or the body's natural defence system. Colds can become worse and develop into pneumonia; TB bacteria may settle in, as well as persistent diarrhoea. This phase of having persistent and serious infections and illnesses is known as AIDS or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The HIV-positive person has developed AIDS.

Pacific seafarers, because of their long periods away from home and other factors, are at increased risk of HIV infection. In response to this,

maritime colleges in the Pacific Islands, in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), have incorporated a compulsory section on HIV and STDs into their new curriculum. The project which runs for two years is funded by the New Zealand Official Development Agency, and includes peer education and resource production as well as training the trainers.

Workshops have already been conducted for trainers from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati and Tuvalu. A train-the-trainers workshop at the Vanuatu Maritime College on Santo last year focussed on trainers who deliver HIV education in the maritime colleges of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. SPC has also sent teaching aids to maritime training centres around the region.

Resource material produced by the SPC HIV/AIDS and STD Project for seafarers includes Safety at Sea stickers and book-marks with a condom message; posters; information leaflets; the Pacific AIDS Alert bulletin; and t-shirts with an AIDS-prevention message. More resource material will be developed in the peer-education phase of the project. SPC fisheries staff take condoms and educational materials for the crew when going on board fishing vessels. In January 2000 all SPC fisheries staff attended an HIV/AIDS and STD information session to enable them to give information when in the field.



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