

Chapter IV

PREVENTIVE EDUCATION AND PUBLICITY

(A) Overview of Existing Efforts

4.1 Preventive education and publicity is the mainstay of the demand reduction efforts; it is the very first line of defence in the war against youth drug abuse. Various stakeholders including ACAN, FCC, legislators, and NGOs alike consider this as the *most effective* means of our five-pronged strategy in combating drug abuse.

4.2 Over the years, great efforts have been made to arouse awareness of the drug issues in the community and to educate the public about the harm of drug abuse. ND has worked hand in hand with ACAN in organising wide-ranging educational and publicity activities to spread the anti-drug messages, in collaboration with many stakeholders in the community. They are supplemented by many other programmes organised by the Hong Kong Police Force (Police), the Customs and Excise Department (Customs), District Fight Crime Committees (DFCCs), NGOs, etc. The Beat Drugs Fund (BDF) is one of the sources of funding for individual projects.

4.3 The Hong Kong Jockey Club Drug InfoCentre (DIC) has served as a platform for providing drug education to students, parents and the general public. Since its opening in August 2004, about 120 000 visitors have patronised DIC.

(B) Issues

4.4 While we have all along spared no efforts on this front, there are widespread community views that we can do more to improve the scope, depth and intensity of preventive education and the publicity measures.

4.5 The Task Force has reviewed the whole matter. Apart from feedback and views from many stakeholders, the Task Force has considered the results of ND's 2007 public opinion survey on Government's anti-drug preventive education programmes and publicity as well as a series of special focus group sessions involving -

- School heads and teachers;
- Parents;
- Social workers;
- Adolescents (non-drug taking); and
- Rehabilitated young drug abusers.

4.6 The Task Force has identified some pertinent issues of concern as follows -

- (a) insufficient understanding of the youth drug abuse problem, and the serious consequences if the trend is not arrested;
- (b) widespread misconception, especially among the youth, that psychotropic substances are less harmful than "traditional" narcotics such as heroin. There are worrying signs of a permeating sub-culture of treating abuse of psychotropic substances as a social norm among the youth;
- (c) inadequate or incorrect knowledge about the legal consequences of drug offences. Many people are not aware that the consumption of drugs itself is illegal¹. Some young people also have the wrong impression that selling or trafficking psychotropic substances does not entail severe legal consequences;
- (d) misconception in some quarters that drug abuse is not their concern or has no relevance to them;

¹ Under section 8(1) of the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134), save under and in accordance with that Ordinance or a licence granted by the Director of Health thereunder, no person shall (a) have in his possession; or (b) smoke, inhale, ingest or inject, a dangerous drug. Under section 8(2) of the same Ordinance, any person who contravenes the aforesaid provision shall be liable to a maximum fine of \$1,000,000 and imprisonment for seven years.

- (e) insufficient drug knowledge or skills among parents, teachers and social workers in identifying signs of drug abuse. This makes it difficult to render early assistance to students and children who have drug abuse problems; and
- (f) drug abuse in many cases is only a manifestation or symptom of broader family or adolescent problems.

4.7 In seeking to enhance preventive education and publicity efforts, our primary aim is to equip our adolescents, parents, teachers and the general community with adequate knowledge about drugs and the drug issues, entrench a beat drug element in the school system, and foster a drug-free youth culture in the community. What follows in this Chapter deals with the general issues and efforts in the community. Chapter V will focus on reinvigorating efforts in the school sector.

(C) Nomenclature and Messages

4.8 It is important that we disseminate the right messages to address the very problems we presently face in combating youth drug abuse – prevalent use of psychotropic substances and various misconceptions about it.

4.9 In this regard, there is a clear opinion in society that the Chinese term “濫藥”² as a common, generic reference to drug abuse does not convey the same degree of seriousness as “吸毒”³. As such, the former does little to correct some common misconceptions about psychotropic substances, especially among young people. This is not helped by the neutral or even positive connotation of “藥” in Chinese which literally means medications, and a misleading suggestion by those who would like to normalise drug abuse that experimental or recreational use is not “濫” meaning “excessive use”.

² Literally can mean “abuse or excessive use of medications”.

³ Literally means “taking drug”.

4.10 That said, another school of thought appreciates the popular acceptance of the pedantic reference of “濫藥” and is wary that the reference of “吸毒” might inadvertently turn young drug abusers away from seeking treatment.

4.11 After careful deliberations and consultations, the Task Force considers that, on balance, there are clear merits in associating the Chinese terminologies relating to psychotropic substances more directly with “毒品”. This position will go a long way to help correct the misconceptions about abuse of psychotropic substances.

Recommendation 4.1

The Task Force recommends that, for future preventive education and publicity purposes, the generic reference to drug abuse should be “吸毒” or “吸食毒品” and the use of such Chinese terms as “濫藥” or “濫用藥物” should be avoided as far as possible. In this context, drugs should be referred to as “毒品”, but not the more neutral term of “藥物”. In the case of psychotropic substances, they should be referred to as “危害精神毒品”⁴, or, for more colloquial usage, “丸仔毒品”, “K仔毒品” or the like, instead of “精神藥物”.

Measures taken thus far

The Administration has since the launch of the territory-wide campaign (see paragraph 4.14 et seq) adopted the new nomenclature, and explained to the public why psychotropic substances such as ketamine and ecstasy are “毒品” in terms

⁴ The Task Force fully appreciates the sensitivities of the nomenclature issue. Members are grateful to the parties which provided useful comments and suggested possible Chinese terms during the process. The Task Force is aware of possible unintended effects of the new Chinese reference in certain circumstances, for example, in extending help to youth at risk and in the medical and other professional contexts, but considers this not insurmountable. Youth at risk are always a specific target group of our preventive education and treatment efforts. To ensure effective communication with them, tailored messages and alternative Chinese terms may be used as appropriate. The Administration would also be careful not to encroach upon the professional usage of the Chinese term “精神科藥物”, which may be used by psychiatrists in prescribing medication for their patients.

of both health impact and addictiveness. It has also appealed to the media and others to adopt the changes.

4.12 The Task Force reckons that the youth drug abuse problem is a community problem with wide implications for all, and should be viewed and tackled as such. Different parties have different parts to play in combating the problem. Efforts in recent years focusing only on certain groups may not be sufficient. In devising publicity and preventive education, messages with suitable emphases should be conveyed to different target groups.

4.13 For reference, the Task Force has recommended the following principal messages for selected target groups -

Generally for all

- youth drug abuse incurs a huge cost to society and is eroding Hong Kong's competitiveness
- abuse of psychotropic substances is as harmful as abuse of traditional drugs like heroin
- drug abuse itself is unlawful, apart from possession, manufacture and trafficking
- all sectors join in and make a contribution to the war against drugs
- report on drugs
- help those in need to seek help

Children

- serious harmful effect of dangerous drugs
- psychotropic substances are as harmful as traditional drugs
- drug abuse is simply unacceptable in society
- a smart kid would say "no" to drugs
- taking drug is addictive

Adolescents

- immediate and long term consequences of abusing psychotropic substances
- abuse of psychotropic substances is not trendy or a social norm
- say “no” to drugs

Youth at risk

- abusing psychotropic substances is not a solution to the problems you face and there are better ways to tackle the problems
- immediate and long-term consequences of abusing psychotropic substances
- drug abuse is a dead end; don’t let drugs ruin your life
- never too late to seek help
- there are people around ready to offer help

Parents

- prevention of drug abuse starts at home
- equip yourself with drug knowledge
- express your care and concern for your children
- know your kid’s friends. Tell kids that those who ask them to take drugs are not friends at all
- enhance communications with children and understand their thinking
- seek help if necessary

Principals and Teachers

- one drug abuse case is too many on campus
- we ought not shy away from the problem
- the significant role of schools, principals and teachers in preventive education and in helping youth at risk
- equip yourself with knowledge in drugs and skills in handling abusers

Social workers

- you are at the forefront to help troubled youth
- be prepared with updated knowledge and skills

Recommendation 4.2

The Task Force recommends that future preventive education and publicity efforts should cover the whole community as well as target specific groups including children, youth at risk and people around them such as parents and teachers. The messages for each target group should be tailor-made, with emphasis on the serious health, legal, family and community consequences of psychotropic substance abuse.

Measures taken thus far

The Administration has adopted this new approach since the launch of the territory-wide campaign (see paragraph 4.14 et seq).

(D) Two-year Territory-wide Campaign

4.14 Having regard to the widespread misconceptions about psychotropic substances not only by the youth and also by general members of the public, and that any preventive efforts cannot be effective without collaboration among different sectors, the Task Force recognises the immediate need for major and intensified territory-wide efforts to bring home the serious harm of psychotropic substances, alerting the community to the worrying trend and situation of youth drug abuse, and mobilising community efforts to redress the same in a concerted and sustained manner. In this connection, the Task Force has already launched a two-year territory-wide campaign to implement these initiatives.

(a) Central publicity campaign

4.15 The central publicity campaign aims to convey to all sectors the key anti-drug messages. It seeks to foster an anti-drug atmosphere, and to mobilise various sectors of the community to take part in the anti-drug cause.

4.16 Various activities and programmes have followed the launch of the territory-wide campaign on 28 June 2008. Under the theme of “不可一、不可再。向毒品說不、向遺憾說不。” and “No Drugs, No Regrets. Not Now, Not Ever”, this two-year campaign seeks to convey to the public the horrific consequences of youth drug abuse based on facts and reality. They include a series of new Announcements in the Public Interest (APIs) depicting real-life experiences and accompanying publicity materials and measures, an anti-drug theme song by a pop music group, and large-scale projects such as a drama production project in collaboration with a radio station and a short-film competition using the Government’s Youth Portal platform (see paragraph 4.32).

(b) Programmes at the district and community level

4.17 The anti-drug campaign cannot be effective and far-reaching without the participation of various sectors of the community. We are forging partnership with many stakeholders, including District Councils, DFCCs, the media, business corporations, professional organisations, women associations, parent-teacher associations, youth organisations, uniformed groups, etc. Many of them are taking forward anti-drug activities and programmes from mid-2008 onwards to complement the central publicity efforts.

4.18 FCC has also adopted combating youth drug abuse as one of the publicity themes in 2008-09. Following its steer, DFCCs are organising various district-based activities, such as talks for parents, dramas, workshops, and anti-drug ambassador schemes to enhance awareness of the drug issues in the community.

4.19 The large number of activities of different nature organised under the Summer Youth Programme (SYP) every year provide another avenue for positive engagement of our children and youth. In the same vein, SYP has also adopted combating abuse of psychotropic substances as one of its themes in 2008.

4.20 For activities at the district and community level, the Home Affairs Department has played a key coordinating and facilitating role among many parties. Not the least, information on the activities is uploaded onto its web site to step up promotion.

Recommendation 4.3

The Task Force recommends that there should be sustained publicity and preventive education to change erroneous attitudes and misconceptions about psychotropic substance abuse, to foster a drug-free culture among the youth, and to appeal to various sectors of the community to support the anti-drug cause. Any campaign should include concerted and coordinated efforts at the district and community level. BDF may also be capitalised on to augment the resources.

Measures taken thus far

The two-year territory-wide campaign with the theme “不可一、不可再。向毒品說不、向遺憾說不。” and “No Drugs, No Regrets. Not Now, Not Ever” was launched in June 2008 to tie in with the annual International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. In support, 59 BDF projects were approved in 2008 with a record grant of some \$33 million.

(E) Parental Education

4.21 The importance of parents in preventing youth drug abuse cannot be over-emphasised. The Task Force fully supports enhancement of preventive education programmes for parents through different channels and means. This requires good planning and provision of activities that are tailored for parents of diverse backgrounds, including working adults with little time to spare. Appropriate measures should be adopted in this regard.

4.22 ND, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and Education Bureau (EDB) have been organising workshops and seminars for parents to enrich their knowledge about drugs, to sharpen their communication skills with children and to inform them of ways to seek help. Many NGOs and parent-teacher associations are also providing similar assistance. The Task Force reckons there is a need to include a drug education element in the more general parenting and healthy living programmes for parents. Apart from dedicated education programmes, clear and relevant anti-drug messages may be embedded in regular programmes organised for parents. Such programmes should also allow parents to understand drug prevention as well as to enhance their skills in communicating with children.

4.23 Upon consulting the parent groups, the Task Force considers it necessary to devise a handy resource kit which could effectively deliver drug education to parents. Apart from providing useful information and answers to parents who may encounter the drug abuse problem at different stages or varying intensity, the resource kit should also contain reference materials for Government departments, parent-teacher associations, schools and other NGOs to plan and organise drug education programmes and modules for parents and train-the-trainers programmes.

Recommendation 4.4

The Task Force recommends more engagement of parents to equip them with drug knowledge and skills to identify and handle youth drug problems. Multiple channels, including

advertisements in the mass media, bill inserts, television drama series, resource kits, as well as seminars and sharing sessions organised by Government departments and NGOs should be utilised to reach out to parents of different backgrounds.

Measures taken thus far

ND is working with EDB, SWD and other relevant departments and NGOs to reach out to parents through various means. The production of a resource kit is underway for completion by early 2009. Demonstrations and training sessions on the use of the kit will be organised afterwards. A web-based version will also be developed to facilitate access to the information and materials.

(F) Engaging the Youth on the Internet

4.24 Popularity of Internet usage by the youth is well known and increasing. It is imperative to exploit this medium for disseminating anti-drug messages to the general youth and to assist those at risk.

4.25 Online resources are now provided through ND's website in the Government domain and other websites scattered over the Internet. The traditional approach of ND's website and its contents should be updated. The idea is to provide quality and user-oriented online anti-drug information and services by –

- (a) enriching the website contents through pulling together various resources;
- (b) designing the website architecture with a view to promoting accessibility and ease of use, meeting the needs of different users, notably young people, parents, teachers, drug dependent people, NGOs, etc;

- (c) enhancing user experience through developing and providing attractive website contents like hosting online interactive games, quality multi-media contents, etc;
- (d) providing a robust and scalable central infrastructure to provide progressive development;
- (e) providing a one-stop gateway to enable users to easily access online resources and services hosted by other organisations (e.g. NGOs providing preventive education, treatment and rehabilitation services); and
- (f) building up a strong and unified branding for the official anti-drug cause in Hong Kong through a domain name like www.nodrugs.gov.hk, to become the online place to go for anyone interested in anti-drug matters in any way.

4.26 Apart from the proposed anti-drug portal, we should exploit further online opportunities to reach out to the youth, in particular those at risk. Many of them may frequent discussion fora, blogs, popular social network and video sharing web sites, etc under the so-called “Web 2.0” trend. Wrong and misleading information about drugs may be easily circulated online without official notice (unlike in traditional media like the television or newspapers), dampening our educational effort. On the other hand, such latest web features can open up great opportunities to engage the youth in a way not envisaged before.

4.27 To take forward these recommendation and ideas, ND is making use of BDF where appropriate and will solicit proposals from the community. Collaboration between NGOs in the anti-drug field and professional entities in the design and IT sectors would be encouraged.

Recommendation 4.5

The Task Force recommends that efforts should be stepped up to engage the youth on the Internet. ND’s website should be revamped and constantly updated to serve as an engaging, informative and useful one-stop Internet resource centre and

portal for the anti-drug cause. Innovative projects should be encouraged and commissioned to make use of the latest features of the Internet medium.

Measures taken thus far

To tie in with the territory-wide campaign launched in June 2008, ND's website has been improved. Further efforts along the lines set out in Paragraph 4.25 will follow.

One of the priority areas of the 2008-2009 annual BDF exercise is dedicated to innovative online projects. One of the projects approved is to develop an interactive online game for the anti-drug cause. Such efforts will continue.

(G) Drug InfoCentre

4.28 Opened in June 2004, DIC located at Low Block, Queensway Government Offices is an exhibition centre dedicated to drug prevention. With an area of 900m², it contains an exhibition hall with audio-visual exhibits, an interactive theatre, a multi-purpose classroom, and a reference library. DIC has received over 120 000 visitors since its opening, including students from primary schools to tertiary institutions, overseas delegations, anti-drug authorities from the Mainland, NGOs and various bodies.

4.29 While DIC has been successful in educating the public on the harmful effects of drug abuse, there is scope to make better use of this precious asset and enhance its role as a platform for anti-drug activities. Besides, in the light of the rising trend of psychotropic substance abuse by the youth and the changing pattern of drug consumption, it is also necessary to update the exhibits and content of DIC. Some possible ideas include –

- (a) the existing exhibits and materials of DIC should be updated and new elements should be prepared with a view to making

the place more attractive and informative to young people, parents and the general public;

- (b) organising more anti-drug activities, such as seminars, at DIC for different sectors of the community, including parents and teachers;
- (c) encouraging community and district organisations to use DIC as both the venue and focal point for anti-drug work; and
- (d) organising roving anti-drug exhibitions at shopping arcades, housing estates and other community locations. This would facilitate dissemination of anti-drug messages to families who live far away from DIC or those who do not have time to visit DIC.

Recommendation 4.6

The Task Force recommends that, as an ongoing effort, DIC should be updated and enhanced as the focal point and resource centre for drug education.

Measures taken thus far

One of the approved projects in the 2008-09 annual BDF exercise is to develop new interactive game consoles at DIC to educate young visitors through engaging means.

(H) Collaboration with Other Policy Areas

4.30 As expounded in Chapter III, drug abuse may sometimes be a manifestation or symptom of some broader issues, such as adolescent health, youth development or family issues. While there is no substitute to direct anti-drug messages in preventive education and publicity, a more holistic, positive approach in addressing such broader issues would also be helpful to the anti-drug cause.

4.31 For example, the Student Health Service run by the Department of Health is a key platform to engage young people to safeguard both their physical and psychological health through comprehensive, promotive and preventive health programmes in both primary and secondary schools. Drug education is an integral element of such programmes. Various departments are working together to make the most of such resources and efforts through better planning, coordination and collaboration.

4.32 Another example is the Government's Youth Portal (youth.gov.hk). Operated by the Efficiency Unit and Radio Television Hong Kong, it is a one-stop service and information platform dedicated to young people. ND has partnered with the Youth Portal to organise anti-drug programmes targeting at the youth, in support of the territory-wide campaign.

Recommendation 4.7

The Task Force recommends that there should be enhanced collaboration of promotional efforts in related policy areas to achieve synergy in anti-drug education.

