

Right to reproductive health for HIV positive people stressed

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Friday, June 22nd, 2012



Vijayawada: For the simple reason they are HIV positive, nobody can deprive them of their right to reproductive health, asserted Sonal Mehta, Director of the Policy and Programme wing of the Alliance International.

Partnering with the Vijayawada-based Vasavya Mahila Mandali (VMM), the Alliance has launched a massive advocacy programme highlighting the plight of people living with HIV (PLHIV), men who have sex with men (MSM), sex workers (SW), trans-genders (TG) and people who use drugs.

Addressing the media here on Thursday, she said that this project, assisted by European Commission and organised jointly by the Alliance International and Vasavya Mahila Mandali, would strengthen civil society organisations and various networks representing these categories. The programme is being implemented in four States of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Gujarat, she added.

The advocacy would be taken up with the decision-makers such as government institutions, parliamentarians and legislators to ensure the sexual and reproductive health rights of PLHIV and others. With increasing access to anti-retroviral (ART) treatment, HIV victims' life span is increased, enabling them to live longer. They could also plan for future including decisions about sex, sexuality, and the possibility of starting or expanding families.

Sonal Mehta said that the PLHIV were already marginalised due to stigma and discrimination and the poor sexual and reproductive health rights made them vulnerable. HIV victims face the problem of poor supply of contraceptives, not treated for sexually transmitted infections, no knowledge of safe sex and prevention, she said.

Secretary of Vasavya Mahila Mandali Rashmi Samaram said that the advocacy programme was being implemented in five districts - East Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Anantapur and Ranga Reddy - in Andhra Pradesh to take the problem of PLHIV to various sections in the society. "We are taking up the issue to the notice of the government to conduct pop smear test to diagnose cervical cancer while conducting CD4 test to PLHIV which costs less than Rs. 10," she added.

G Jagadish Kumar, State programme manager said that the programme would train the trainers to undertake advocacy with various groups of decision makers. Ramanujaiah, project coordinator also participated.

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