

## REPORT FROM THE LATIN-AMERICA REGIONAL DIRECTOR TO IUSTI EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING, Brisbane 2015

### ALACITS members contributing to HIV Research in Women in Latin America

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of AIDS Research (OAR) invited members of ALACITS to participate in the HIV in Women in the Latin America Think Tank Planning Meeting which happened in October 9-10, 2014.

Participants were representatives of the Latin American and Caribbean Association for Prevention and Control of STIs such as Dr. Patricia J. Garcia from Peru, Dr. Angelica Espinoza from Brazil and Dr. Freddy Tinajeros from Bolivia. Other countries participating were Mexico with representatives from both, Universities and the Ministry of Health, Puerto Rico as well as US researchers working on HIV/STD issues in Latino populations.

During the meeting, the discussion was centered on HIV in women in Latin America: how it is understudied due to scarcity of resources, and because the main focus of research relates to prevention of maternal to child transmission and work with high prevalence groups like MSM. So the HIV epidemic in women is hidden, underscoring factors like substance abuse, sex work, poverty, power control issues affecting women prevention. The fact that HIV epidemic in women is focal does not imply it is limited, has the potential to expand too.

The group debated about the potential for effective focal prevention and the need to raise the profile of this hidden issue, the need for research to better understand the women's HIV epidemic in Latin America in order to inform prevention and clinical management efforts and how to develop collaborative relationships between U.S. and Latin American investigators, leveraging existing research resources and efforts.

A directory of key people working on the issue of HIV/STIs in Latin America in different countries was drafted and the plan is to have a following workshop in Panama or Peru in the months to come. A written summary of the meeting is being prepared.

### Activities from countries

In Country associations against STIs have been active and collaborating with their Ministries of Health.

### STI news from Chile

During 2014 and 2015, Chile has developed lines of work that have strengthened public policies for the prevention and control of STIs, among which are:

#### *Introduction of the HPV Vaccine*

The Ministry of Health has introduced in the National Vaccine Immunization Program (NIP) the quadrivalent HPV vaccine enabling all girls aged 9 to be protected against cervical cancer and genital warts. This represents a very important step



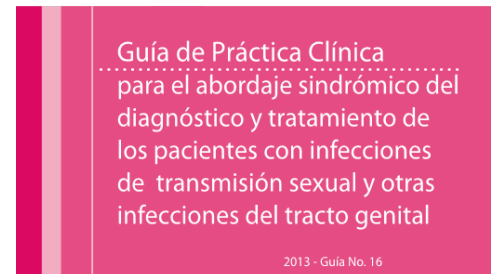
for health equality in the country, since this measure will be available to all girls in Chile regardless of their place of birth, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

#### *Elimination of Vertical Transmission of HIV and Syphilis*

Continuing the strategy for the Elimination of Vertical Transmission of HIV and Syphilis, the Ministry of Health and the Public Health Institute of Chile have developed a series of activities to strengthen the network for the diagnosis of syphilis in the public health system, including a national workshop including all laboratories within the public network. The main issues discussed were quality assurance.

## From Colombia

The Ministry of Health has updated in 2015 the guidelines for the syndromic management of sexually transmitted infections, based on scientific evidence. These guidelines will be very useful in Colombia and are intended to contribute to improve the response capacity of health care providers, promoting continuous improvement through the definition of standards and the development of tools for evaluating the quality of care.



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## From Uruguay

### Improving reporting of maternal syphilis and HIV

In Uruguay prior to 2012 data related to syphilis and HIV during pregnancy, congenital syphilis (CS) and vertical transmission of HIV, were obtained through:

- Epidemiological surveillance through notification: which although is mandatory, it is dependent on the provider and usually shows underreporting of cases and unreliable notification congenital syphilis cases.
- SIP (perinatal information system) which provides information of reactive syphilis testing in both the pregnant woman and cord blood. This overestimates the incidence since a proportion of the results does not correspond to real syphilis and has it has been observed errors in recording data
- Electronic certificates of live births (CNVE) which record VDRL and HIV performed during pregnancy.

**Table 1: Maternal Prevalence of syphilis and HIV (2012 Audited data)**

The Ministry of Health initiated a national internal auditing of all cases of syphilis testing and / or reactive HIV during pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and/or newborn for 2012. The objective of the auditing system is to "support the process of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Plan for the Elimination of Congenital Syphilis and vertical transmission (TV) of HIV in Uruguay.

	Maternal Syphilis Prevalence	Maternal VIH prevalence
Public	1.9% (373/19542)	1.1% (213/19542)
Private	0.6% (175/27632)	0.3% (81/27632)
Total	1.2% (548/47174)	0.6% (294/47174)

The audits of cases will allow defining a reliable baseline prevalence of syphilis in pregnancy, incidence of SC, HIV prevalence in pregnancy and the rate of HIV vertical transmission. The audited data is shown in table 1. Congenital syphilis incidence (CS) was found to be 2 cases per 1,000 live births , 70% less than the estimated . In the public subsector CS was found to be 4.3 cases / 1000 live births and in the private subsector CS was 0.43 cases / 1000 live births.

## **From Argentina**

The Argentinian Association against STIs (ASAIGO) has performed several activities, including training for the prevention and control of STIs:

- Virtual course on gynecology and obstetrics infections. With participation of students from several Latin American countries
- Inclusion of topics related to STIs in national and International conferences related to other Argentinian scientific societies.
- Permanent participation in meetings to develop national consensus guidelines for the management of STDs and HIV / AIDS organized by the Ministry of Health
- "The Bug in the pension." Play to raise awareness on prevention of STI and HIV / AIDS. In cultural centers, hospitals, slums and schools.
- Advice and support to the pilot project "Access to virtual counseling and consultation for the early detection of HPV by sending photos by WhatsApp" organized by the Department of Dermatology at HIGA Eva Peron, San Martin. Buenos Aires. The objective of the program is to facilitate access of the population to sexually transmitted genital lesions for both sexes Hospital for proper diagnosis and treatment. The tools in the service of the community are the WhatsApp application and email.

## **From Bolivia**

The Bolivian Association for the Control of STI (ABITS), alongside with the Department of STD / HIV / AIDS , the Society of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics and PAHO Bolivia organized a Workshop on STIs and HIV to update staff health Department of Tarija. The facilitators of the workshop were national speakers and guests from Argentina.

The course allowed sharing the latest epidemiological data on STIs and HIV, STI and ARV therapy management according to the National Committee and therapeutic gaps and challenges in the areas of prevention and control of STIs and HIV.

## **From Honduras**

UNAIDS and CONASIDA Honduras published the document "Systematization of the 2013 approaches to the size of the populations of SW and MSM applicable to Honduras and Central America.

## **From Peru**

A new project entitled "Hope: Human papillomavirus screening to improve women's life", has been started with the collaboration of the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia and the Ministry of Health, with funding from Grand Challenges Canada. The objective of this study is to evaluate the performance and feasibility of the implementation of a new screening model for cervical cancer, including community women as promoters, the use of self-administered vaginal swabs for collection of samples, and the introduction of new molecular HPV tests. The study will be performed in Ventanilla a Shanty town in the middle of the coastal desert, north of Lima, the capital of Peru.

## **Translation to Spanish of Editor's choice articles from STI journal available for Latin American members**

Unfortunately due to the lack of resources we have not been able to continue these activities.