

Editor's note: A programme entitled "Care for the AIDS Victims" was launched on Saturday. It was promoted at the Rotary AIDS Ball — an event that was sponsored in part by China Daily. Following are reports written by CHEN JIE and YU NAN focusing on the issue of giving help to AIDS victims.

# Aid for those with AIDS

## Beijing Rotary ball seeks fair treatment for AIDS patients

### Celebrities offer social support

**Kerstin Leitner, resident coordinator of the United Nations (UN) in China, resident representative of UN Development Programme:**

"It is important to raise public awareness and to help people protect themselves. But they should protect themselves in a way that those who have the disease still have a chance for a dignified life.

"People naturally discriminate against people who have HIV/AIDS. They 'put them aside,' or 'put them in quarantine.' And we know from international experience that it is not necessary to do so.

"This is about prevention but it's also about care — about care of people who are considered to be victims of ignorance. We are working to stop more people becoming the victims of ignorance."

**Yue-Sai Kan, a former TV anchor, founder and CEO of Yue-Sai Cosmetics**

"A number of my friends from different parts of the world have died of AIDS. Now my country of birth, China, may be on the brink of a major catastrophe. How can I, a Chinese, not try to help, even in a modest way to try to prevent this?"

"The first step to fight against the disease is make it not so sensitive, a mission that the media can help with — to give more open and clear information on AIDS."

**Martin L. Gordon, senior adviser with UBS Warburg Ltd** UBS Warburg Ltd is a subsidiary and business group of UBS AG:

"I saw the terrible things that happened with AIDS in America and Europe in the 1980s. I saw so many excellent friends of mine getting the disease over the past 20 years, it is obvious to me that China is going to develop a major problem.

"Anything I can do to help improve understanding and awareness of prevention in China might contribute to preventing the epidemic becoming as big as in other countries."

**Serge Dumont, president of the Rotary Club of Beijing:**

"I still remember how scared I felt when I hugged one of my friends who had HIV/AIDS for the first time. But later, after I saw the pictures of Princess Diana kissing and shaking hands with the HIV/AIDS patients on the TV, her courage moved me a lot and that was when I and many other people in my country began to learn what AIDS was.

"There are many reasons why we should all feel concerned, although many of us mistakenly think that AIDS is so far removed from our lives that it is 'not really our problem.'"

"As human beings, we cannot stay idle in the face of the distress, solitude, and exclusion other human beings feel because of this dreadful disease."

**Kofi A. Annan, the secretary-general of United Nations:**

"Speaking openly about the epidemic is the first step to winning the fight against it. Silence is death. People need to know that they can be tested without the risk of stigma, that if they are infected, they will be treated; that if they fail ill, they can live safe from discrimination; that confronting AIDS is a point of pride, not a source of shame."



**Left:** Martin L. Gordon, Chairman of Barry & Martin's Trust, presents the 2002 Barry & Martin's Prize to Xu Lianzhi of the Infectious Diseases Department of Beijing You'an Hospital. Xu has been devoted to AIDS prevention, treatment and care since 1989. **Above:** Co-hosting the event are Yue-Sai Kan (right) and Pu Cunxin, who has been China's spokesman on AIDS prevention and cure since 2000.

Photos by JIANG DONG/China Daily



**Warm heart:** Star VJ Li Xia with MTV China (middle) and actress Anita Mui (left) at the auction of a Christian Dior designer bag signed by John Galliano, which fetched 30,000 yuan (US\$3,600).



**Above:** Hu Bing (right, standing) sells "Lucky Draw" tickets at the ball. Each ticket cost 25 yuan (US\$3) and was another form of donation. **Left:** Serge Dumont, president of Rotary Club of Beijing (Provisional) bid 90,000 yuan (US\$10,800) for a pair of sunglasses worn by Elton John on his 1972 music tour, donated by the Elton John AIDS Foundation.

To be infected with HIV is just getting an illness, not a sin. That was the opinion of an HIV/AIDS carrier expressed two years ago during an interview on Tell It Like It Is, a popular television talk show.

His words were simple but strong enough to reflect the desire of HIV/AIDS patients for dignity and better understanding from society.

The two HIV/AIDS carriers on the programme agreed to attend on condition their bodies would be covered by a folding screen and they would be introduced to the audiences with fake names.

Even their voices were changed for the broadcast because in their view "if people know, I will lose everything." Their worries are reasonable.

Too many stories of discrimination have been reported. These include children who cannot go to school because they have HIV-positive parents; shops that will not sell goods to a woman whose husband has AIDS out of fear that the terminal disease can be transmitted by contact or banknotes; crematoria that do not accept bodies of AIDS victims despite hospitals making it clear that the bodies have been disinfected.

Discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients does even more harm than the virus itself, said Pu Cunxin, a popular film and theatre star in China.

### A long way to go

Eighteen years have passed since the first AIDS case was discovered in China in 1985, but people's fear of and discrimination towards AIDS victims do not seem to have eased, said Pu Cunxin.

He shared his latest experience when shooting the first TV play to have a theme of AIDS last year in Zhuhai, the nearest Chinese mainland city to Macao.

Entitled "Lost Paradise," the 30-

battles the fatal disease with the help of friends and relatives. Pu played the protagonist.

The production unit was given an unexpected cold reception during shooting. Few people wanted to rent their places for shooting scenes when they heard the TV drama was about AIDS.

Taxi drivers would stop, ask them to leave their car and drive away when they heard their discussions about the stories of AIDS in the play. Restaurants didn't allow them to finish dinner just because their discussions of AIDS were scaring away other guests, said Pu.

"People still think that only those who are filthy and degraded will have the disease," Pu said.

Pu and his crew made up their minds that they should work even harder to produce the best TV drama possible because of the need to encourage society to use every means to promote public awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention and provide more understanding of and support for HIV/AIDS patients, said TV drama director Yu Gengeng.

The Beijing Youth Daily launched a poll on www.rongshu.com in July to demonstrate the seriousness of people's ignorance about AIDS.

More than 15,000 people cast their votes for five questions about HIV/AIDS and their attitudes towards HIV carriers and AIDS patients. A total of 73 per cent admitted they knew "little about HIV/AIDS."

"That's why education is so important here," said Pu. "A lack of basic

knowledge of how HIV/AIDS spreads and thus how to protect themselves has led many people to contract the fatal disease unknowingly."

In October, the Ministry of Health released a figure that might have astonished many — the number of people with HIV/AIDS in the country by July had topped 1 million. This was an increase of 16.7 per cent on the same period in 2001.

Experts warned the number may climb to 10 million by 2010 unless efficient prevention and control measures are adopted.

It is this ignorance about the disease that causes fear and discrimination against people infected with HIV/AIDS, said Ma Xiaowei, vice-minister of the Ministry of Health. "If we want more than 1 billion people to know about it, then it is clear we have a long way to go," Ma said.

### Treat them fairly

Research proves that contact such as shaking hands or eating together does not involve any risk.

"Yet science pales before people's fears of the disease," said Xu Lianzhi, a doctor at Beijing You'an Hospital, one of the earliest hospitals in China to offer medical treatment to HIV/AIDS patients.

People are still being rejected by hotels, restaurants, clinics, and are subjected to abuse of passers-by, she said.

The 69-year-old received her first AIDS patient at the hospital in 1989. Since then, Xu has been engaged in trying to arouse public care of those infected with HIV/AIDS.

In addition to travelling across the country to spread knowledge of AIDS, Xu initiated the AIDS hotline and established "Home of Loving Care" in the hospital which provides medical treatment, counselling and training for HIV/AIDS patients.

It now has more than 800 volunteers providing services to patients, including medical workers, actors,

with HIV/AIDS spoke gloomily about his life and his desire to live in isolation.

Xu was able to trace the young man's home, following the address he offered. But she did not find the young man there — just an elderly woman who said there was nobody with that name living at the address.

Xu later discovered the woman was the mother of the young man. "If some of your friends or relatives get the disease, they deserve better care and at least a fair life," Xu said.

"In this way, they will feel they have not been abandoned by society and will therefore develop a sense of responsibility to protect society but not act out of revenge."

Xiao Li, a 25-year-old HIV carrier who was infected via a blood transfusion at high school, said people became especially sensitive about discrimination once they had been infected the disease.

"I think the real things we need are dignity and the chance of a fair life," he said. "Sometimes, care and sympathy cannot compare with fairness and equality."

Xiao Li was pleased to learn that more than 60 per cent of voters on the Internet poll had opted to "care for and treat them better" when asked how they would treat their friends who had HIV/AIDS.

World AIDS Day last year was themed "live, let live," appealing for more care and respect for HIV/AIDS sufferers and their right to life.

Our real enemy is the virus and not the patients, Xu stressed.

# Black tie turn-out improves public awareness, raises funds

The Kempinski Hotel in Beijing attracted a star-studded line-up on Saturday evening.

Senior government officials, business people, ambassadors, stars from sports and the arts, and other local celebrities walked the red carpet to attend the Rotary AIDS Ball.

The Rotary Club of Beijing joined forces with seven other sponsors to dedicate the black tie gala dinner and ball to improving HIV/AIDS awareness and raising money in support of its prevention and cure.

On auction, the event raised 600,000 yuan (US\$72,464).

"Experience elsewhere has shown that only by involving high-level government officials, senior business leaders and celebrities can significant progress be made in raising awareness of AIDS as a critical public health issue," said Serge Dumont, president of Rotary Club Beijing (Provisional).

"By enlisting the support of such top-level influences, we hope to recruit the most effective persuaders available and rally them to this crucial cause," he added.

The ball began with China Philharmonic Orchestra's rendition of Dvorak's string quartet in F major and was hosted by Yue-Sai Kan and actor Pu Cunxin.

"Thank you all for coming to the banquet. It is as if all of us are linking arm-in-arm to build a great wall to fight against AIDS," said Pu in his opening speech. Pu is China's first spokesman for AIDS prevention and cure since 2000.

Yue-Sai Kan read tribute letters from celebrities and government leaders including Vice-Premier Wu Yi.

Ma Xiaowei, vice-minister of the Ministry of Health, and professor Zeng Yi, president of the Chinese Foundation for Prevention of STD (sexually transmitted diseases) and

AIDS, gave speeches before dinner.

Ma said the event is a good way to raise money to help AIDS sufferers and their families as well as to generate awareness of the disease.

Zeng said the government has done much to prevent and control the epidemic, but there is still little publicity about AIDS.

"In addition, we have not shown enough care for people with HIV/AIDS and we have not put enough money into the project," said Zeng.

It is estimated that 10 million people could be infected with AIDS by 2010 in China.

But if the disease is kept under control, 4 to 5 million people will be saved from the fatal illness.

Elizabeth Taylor, who was unable to attend the banquet because of a broken leg, sent a video message to guests.

Taylor said: "On behalf of the board of directors and staff of the American Foundation for AIDS Research, I

would like to thank each of you for being with us this evening to begin raising urgently needed funds for China's efforts to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS.

"I know that China has the will and determination to overcome this deadly epidemic — as it has triumphed over significant health challenges in the past — by emphasizing prevention and health care."

At the ball, Martin L. Gordon, chairman of Barry & Martin's Trust, presented the 2002 Barry & Martin's Prize to Dr. Xu Lianzhi from the Infectious Diseases Department of Beijing You'an Hospital. She was recognized for her kind and unprejudiced treatment of AIDS patients and for her establishment of the Home of Loving Care for AIDS sufferers.

The ball's entertainment programme included Eric Vu-An, an acclaimed French modern dancer, who performed the solo ballet "Arepo," cho-

reographed by Maurice Bejart.

Vu-An wore a red tight costume, incorporating the AIDS charity symbol of the red ribbon in his dance.

"It was a little bit strange when Serge Dumont invited me to the event, because I have never performed at such an event," Vu-An told China Daily before the banquet.

"But I feel honoured to perform here to raise money as well as awareness in the fight against AIDS. I hope my dance gives people power."

"As a dancer, I have witnessed how the epidemic plagues the arts," Vu-An added. He mentioned Rudolph Nuryev, one of the best dancers of last century, who died of AIDS in 1993.

Peking Opera actress Zheng Ziru performed part of her newly-created "Jeanne d'Arc," a work fusing Chinese culture with a French story.

The climax of the evening was an auction of items donated by celebrities. Chinese super model Hu Bing and

star VJ Li Xia added excitement to the auction. Many stars of the entertainment world took to the stage to encourage guests to up the bidding for their donations.

The first item, a calligraphy scroll by Aisin-gioro Pu Ren, brother of Aisin-gioro Pu Yi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), went to Anwer Islam, president of Rotary Club of Kingspark Hong Kong, for 50,000 yuan (US\$6,039).

Li Yifei, president of MTV China, went home with ex-Spice Girl Geri Halliwell's mini-skirt for 80,000 yuan (US\$9,662). Yue-Sai Kan paid 7,000 yuan (US\$845) for Michelle Yeoh's autographed bag. Serge Dumont paid 25,000 yuan (US\$3,019) for Hong Kong star Nicholas Tse's watch.

The most expensive item on auction is a painting "Lasting Charm of Tang Dynasty" donated by artist Liu Yuyi, which got a bid of 120,000 yuan (US\$14,493).