



Left to right: Dr. Brent Hardt, Charge d’Affaires, US Embassy to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean; Kendra Phillips of USAID and Dr. Joy St. John, Chief Medical Officer.

Urgent need for co-ordinated regional response to HIV/AIDS

“THE need for a co-ordinated response to HIV and AIDS be-

comes clearer every-day.”

Those were the beliefs put forward by Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Joy St. John, in support of a two-day workshop involving talks about maintaining the HIV response within the region.

The workshop called “Strengthening Health Systems and Engaging the Private Sector: Stakeholder Consultation on Sustaining the HIV Response in the Caribbean”, was the collaborative effort of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, and the President’s Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). It was the aim of the organisers to bring together as many stakeholders in the HIV response as possible.

In addition to representatives from the organising bodies, the consultation workshop featured representatives from a host of stakeholders from governments, non-governmental organisations, private sector groups and donor agencies, including UNAIDS, UNIFEM, UNDP, PAHO, PANCAP, UWI and representatives from the various Ministries of Health throughout the region.

As Dr. St. John made clear, the large attendance gave testimony to the recognition of the significance of all the stakeholders working together in the response to HIV, as it is only through collabora-

tion that HIV/AIDS can be tackled on a global level.

“You no doubt must have heard the term ‘no man is an island’; therefore, it will take diverse groups such as this one here today to pool their resources to enable a sustained and co-ordinated effort in order to make a significant difference, especially in preventing new cases of this disease,” Dr. St. John noted.

Dr. St. John admitted that the facts every country’s AIDS epidemic is unique, but added that there are many commonalities within the Caribbean region which perhaps have caused the rate of infection in the Caribbean to be more difficult to control.

“There are many common threads that bind the Caribbean together. This scenario is played out against a background of poverty, surprising gaps in knowledge and understanding of fundamental principles, gender inequalities and a heavy dose of HIV-related stigma. In addition, migration between our islands is a commonplace event, thus blurring the lines between different national epidemics,” Dr. St. John explained.

The Chief Medical Officer, along with the gathered stakeholders, was optimistic that the two-day workshop would be a stepping stone toward the ultimate goal of the prevention, mediation and control of the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, as well as globally. (AN)

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