Opening Address

Current AIDS Situation & An Update on Zidovudine in The Treatment of HIV*

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Honoured guests, Members of both Societies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Being a co-host of this Symposium on the “Current AIDS Situation and An update of Zidovudine in the treatment of HIV Infection”. It is truly a special honor for me to perform the opening address of this symposium.

Ever since the first imported case of AIDS in a Thai patient was recognized in 1984; we who are in the medical profession, are well aware of the potential danger of this disease. We are regularly informed of the current situation. Unfortunately, this disease is continuously spreading in our community slowly at the beginning and at the alarming pace lately.

As you all know, this disease occurs in at least 136 countries around the world, and more than 84 thousand cases have been reported. The World Health Organization estimated the overall numbers of AIDS victims to be around 150,000 and probably 5-10 million people are unaware that they are the carriers of HIV.

In the medical profession, it is our responsibility to make the utmost efforts in making the Thai public well aware of this disease which is potentially the most dangerous disease of our generation. We should all try to stop the spreading of this infection at all costs, NOW before it becomes too late! Let me ask you “Have we done enough?”.

As a Member of the Senate Committee on Public Health and Environment, I proposed to the Public Health Authorities in October last year that, similar to some countries, we urgently need a new law to cope with this problem more efficiently. However, I am rather disappointed at the Government’s attitude: they prefer to play it cool, and, in my opinion, they are still not really aware of the danger.

The recent findings of high percentage of HIV antibody among the drug addicts in this country posted even more threat to the general public than before since it is estimated that there are many hundred thousand of drug addicts all over the country.

These group of persons as you know, are sexually active. The findings of HIV carriers among the heterosexual, bisexual and in some percentage among the prostitutes indicate clearly the immediate danger to our community. WHO has warned that Thailand is facing an explosive epidemics of AIDS. May I ask you again “Will we let this thing happen to our community?”.

The authorities keep on informing the public that at present we have only 4 living AIDS and 27 AIDS Related Complex cases. Certainly, these people need help in term of treatment. There have been numerous reports on the clinical trials by different drugs beginning with suramin and antimoniotuntate, phosphonoformate, ribavarin, imuthiol etc. but the results were disappointed. For antiviral treatment various potential targets have been identified. Current efforts are being focussed on specific inhibitors of HIV reverse transcriptase enzymes.

The second generation of reverse transcriptase inhibitor namely Azidothymidine or AZT which recently was named Zidovudine has shown considerable activity against HIV. It is orally absorbed and has shown significant reduction in morbidity and mortality but it may induce hematologic toxicity. Recently a new drug Dideoxycytidine has been shown to be a more potent inhibitor of HIV and less toxic to zidovudine. It is still in phase I study. Today we are fortunate to hear the first hand informations from an expert in this field Dr. David Barry, who has compiled thousands of cases study in the U.S.

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**President of The Infectious Diseases Association of Thailand May 18th, 1988, Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel, Bangkok.
For AIDS, the medical treatment is the last hope and it is a very expensive. For a small country with limited resources like Thailand, the costs of treatment may drain all the health care resources!. We therefore must try to prevent and control this deadly disease, now at all cost!. Again may I ask you “Have we done what should have been done?”.

Before you hear the first paper on “The current AIDS situation in Thailand” by Dr. Wiwat Rojanaphayakon, Director, Center for Prevention and Controls of AIDS, Dept of Communicable Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, I would like to express a warm welcome for all the participants and I would like to conclude my address, by quoting, the title of an Editorial in the Bangkok Post, April 8, of this year, which read “The Best Friend of AIDS is Apathy”.

Thank you.