Short Communication

Current Status of AIDS Measures in Japanese Companies

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The estimated median of cumulative AIDS cases (excluding cases in hemophiliacs) in Japan for the year 2002 is 3,500, and the estimate for HIV carriers (excluding AIDS patients) is 18,300¹⁾. Because 90% of people with AIDS (PWAs) are between 20 and 50 years old, not a few Japanese companies will have an employee who has AIDS or is infected with HIV in the future. Every company will have to take appropriate measures to prevent problems presented by AIDS. It is important to know the current status of company AIDS measures in order to devise an AIDS policy, but only limited knowledge has been accumulated to date on the subject^{2,3)}. This study was performed to elucidate the current status of AIDS measures in the Japanese business community.

Methods

The subjects of this study were all the Japanese companies listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange as of April, 1993 (n=1,655). We developed a questionnaire having 29 multiple-choice questions to clarify the current status of AIDS measures. The questionnaire was mailed to the companies in June, 1993, requesting that it be filled out by the director of the personnel department. There was no identifying information on the questionnaire, but a number was printed on the stamped, self-addressed envelope enclosed with it to be able to send a reminder to companies that had not replied by the deadline. The data were analyzed with the computer software package Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

Results

We received 620 replies, a response rate of 37.5%. Manufacturing industries accounted for 58.4% of the

total number of responding companies, and companies with more than 1,000 employees accounted for 72.7% of them.

Only 0.5% (n=3) of the companies experienced problems regarding AIDS in the workplace. AIDS issues were presented as one of the items on the agenda of formal company meetings in 41.5% of the responding companies. Meetings in the personnel department, meetings in the health care section and safety and health committee meetings constituted the three major formal meetings where AIDS issues were presented as an item on the agenda (Table 1). AIDS issues were presented in various company documents in 56.9% of the companies. At 77.9%, company documents which referred to AIDS issues most often were brochures issued by the health insurance society (Table 2).

In regard to the status of implementation of AIDS measures in the workplace, 36.8% of the companies had taken some action, 25.8% were developing AIDS measures, 7.4% had no plans to develop them and 30.0% had not considered it. More companies with employees who live in foreign countries or travel abroad had implemented or were developing AIDS measures than those that did not (Table 3).

The most frequently implemented measure was education to prevent HIV/AIDS (91.2% of implementing companies), followed by education to eliminate prejudice or discrimination against per-

Table 1. Proportion of formal company meetings in which AIDS issues have been discussed (Multiple answers n=257)

Names of the formal meetings	Number	%
Personnel department meetings	128	49.8
Meetings in health care sections	124	48.2
Safety and health committee meetings	124	48.2
Meetings with occupational physicians	88	34.2
Meetings with labor unions	58	22.6
Board meetings	42	16.3
Others	30	11.7

Table 2. Proportion of company documents in which AIDS issues have been mentioned (Multiple answers n=353)

Types of company documents	Number	%
Brochures from HIS	275	77.9
In-house newspapers	104	29.5
Brochures from health section	87	24.6
In-house circulars	50	14.2
Others	40	11.3

HIS: Health Insurance Society.

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Table 3. Current status of AIDS measures in Japanese companies according to whether they have employees living abroad or traveling abroad

Current status of AIDS measures	Employees living abroad				Employees traveling abroad			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Implemented	205	42.4	23	16.8	222	38.4	4	10.3
Developing	129	26.7	31	22.6	152	26.3	7	17.9
Will not develop	29	6.0	17	12.4	43	7.4	3	7.7
Not decided yet	120	24.8	66	48.2	161	27.9	25	64.1
Totals	483	100.0	137	100.0	578	100.0	39	100.0

sons with AIDS (PWAs) (52.2%), education of employees' family members (20.6%), education and training of supervisors (20.2%), and development of a policy statement or manual (18.0%).

Personnel department employees were most frequently engaged in AIDS education and training, followed by occupational physicians, occupational nurses and health supervisors (Table 4).

Discussion

This study is the first survey which clarified the status of AIDS measures in large Japanese companies, because previous surveys are either using small and medium-scale enterprises as subjects²⁾ or soliciting managers' personal opinions regarding AIDS³⁾.

The results of this study show that only a few companies had problems relating to AIDS/HIV. In spite of the low incidence, Japanese companies seem to be taking an interest in AIDS/HIV issues, considering the proportion of companies that had formally adopted AIDS issues as an agenda of company meetings or had implemented AIDS measures. Our findings indicate that many companies recognized the importance of AIDS education in the workplace.

This study has also shown that personnel departments are currently the main agents in AIDS/HIV issues and in taking the initiative in their management, judging from the higher frequency of meetings held in the personnel department and higher proportion of people in charge of AIDS education and training. Health insurance societies (HISs) were also eager to provide information on AIDS. Compared with personnel department or HISs, occupational health professionals did not seem to be actively involved in activities regarding AIDS/HIV

Table 4. Personnel in charge of AIDS health education in companies (Multiple answers n = 207)

Personnel	Number	%
Personnel dep. employees	115	55.6
Occupational physician	91	44.0
Occupational nurse	60	29.0
Health supervisor	52	25.1
Outside professional	18	8.7
Others	27	13.0

issues. Because AIDS issues confront occupational health with serious problems, and the workplace is an important environment for disseminating information and education about the transmission and prevention of AIDS, occupational health professionals should take the initiative in dealing with the issue.

The low response rate constitutes a major weakness of this study. The companies comprising the sample may represent a very special group because they take a strong interest in AIDS/HIV issues in the workplace. Caution should therefore be exercised in making generalizations based on the results of this study.

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