

NEWS RELEASE

## Healthy Men – Great Sex

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Three hundred and twelve (312) men recently got pointers on how to have great sex. Through a series of workshops entitled Healthy Men – Great Sex, a poignant reminder was sent from the lead agency in Sexual and Reproductive Health locally, the National Family Planning Board (NFPB), urging men to act more responsibly where matters related to their sexuality are concerned. The workshops for male audiences alerted them to the link between Masculinity & Reproductive Health/Behaviour, Relationships & Reproductive Health as well as Complications of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and measures for prevention. Participants were drawn from male-dominated agencies such as the security forces, fire and correctional services in Portland, Clarendon, St. Thomas, St. Elizabeth, Westmoreland, Kingston & St. Andrew, and St. Ann. Representatives from the disability sector and youth clubs were among the audiences as well.

Spearheaded by the NFPB's Training Unit, the segmented workshops set out to

- Explain the impact of masculinity on men's attitude and behaviour
- Explore factors relating to healthy male/female relationships
- Identify the complications of sexually transmitted infection and how to prevent STIs.

### **Masculinity and Reproductive Health/Behaviour:**

Openly reviewed were definitions of masculinity, and the ways in which men express it. The societal pressures placed on young males to live up to a macho characterisation for fear of appearing effeminate, have contributed to a level of intolerance in cases and has led to the cultivation of aggressive behaviour toward effeminate males and to their very own female partners. In a male survivability study conducted by Herbert Gayle, he concludes that males are socialised to prove they are powerful and in charge which may influence them to make irresponsible sexual decisions as well as to get involved in violent activity.

Risk taking, aggression, assertiveness, toughness and conquest-seeking displays, and the exhibiting of sexual prowess have been encouraged to the point where little attention if any is paid by society to the folly of sexually active males as young as 13 years.

The identification of positive role models and peer-to-peer interventions are ways of tempering this harsh reality, providing an alternative to following the negative behaviours. Feelings of marginalisation reportedly emerged in the workshops as some of the males took issue with the lack of, and vocalised the need for the formation of interest groups that could lobby for them as strongly as those which exist for women. Complaints of lack of access to services and correct Reproductive Health information, carries an element of truth as the National Centre for Youth Development (NCYD) has examined youth serving programmes and established that young women constitute two-third of the programme beneficiaries.

Dr. Chloe Morris summarised succinctly how positive images of masculinity and Reproductive Health behaviour could be created, positing men should be encouraged to talk about their health concerns, and as far as possible attempts should be made to highlight positive examples of mentors when discussing sensitive matters such as erectile dysfunction, prostate health and diabetes. Their role within the family as resource persons would expand as they would be in a position to impart valuable information about the challenges and successes in life to children, and contribute to important decisions such as the economics of the household. Dr. Morris recommended that the significant women in their lives should be encouraged to involve them in planning at all levels, and to protect themselves and their family from infections.

### **Relationships and Reproductive Health**

As far as discussions on relationships and Reproductive Health were concerned the disparity often seen in the rearing of boys and girls and the guidance the early influences can have on gender roles, relationships and Reproductive Health in later life came to the fore. Society has seen where girls in some instances are being raised to be dependent, passive and sensitive while boys are groomed to be independent, aggressive, and even insensitive. These behaviours exhibited by males are not expected of females.

Limits such as these allow males to become more sexually experienced than young women, with men being seven times more likely to have multiple partners than women. As far as men's Reproductive Health is concerned this 'advantage' allows them to wield tremendous power in influencing their partners' health and her fertility whether positively or negatively. The realisation of males negative Reproductive Health behaviours on women and their offspring prompted a commitment on the part of the men to try and change the mind set of successive generations, starting with the young around them. Commitments to mentor the young, especially young males, provided a positive expression of the way forward.

### **Preventing STIs and Complications**

The NFPB commissioned Dual Method Use study details a dual method usage rate of approximately 15 per cent among women and 6 per cent among men. Of this number approximately 71 per cent of users worry a lot about getting an STI and 45 per cent worry about pregnancy. Acknowledgement of the reality of images of STIs and the debilitating effects admittedly has not daunted some men sufficiently for them to use condoms with

non-regular partners. One in four men do not protect themselves. Aside from STIs there is the threat of HIV transmission from transactional and commercial sex. The Ministry of Health reports that a 2005 survey of sex workers revealed that nine per cent of male sex workers were HIV infected. Sex with sex workers is but one of the factors fuelling the AID epidemic.

Within some communities, the more sex partners males have the greater the esteem with which they are held among the group. However, the health risks associated with non-use of a condom have been communicated to audiences using various mediums. The awareness is present but the real challenge is translating that knowledge into practice. These NFPB-sponsored workshops are stretching across that divide - between knowledge and attitude change to create practice in the men's lives. .

At the close, participants were advised to

1. Communication their expectations to their partner before becoming involved in a sexual situation.
2. Foster a healthy sexual relationship, where partners care about each other and share the responsibilities that come with sexual activity like communicating honestly about their desires and needs, protecting their partner and themselves from unwanted pregnancy and STIs, and treating their partner with respect.

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