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# Government Hospital Stops Free Medical Services to HIV/AIDS Sufferers

Wednesday 23 January 2008, by [Shah Paung](#) (Date first published: 23 January 2008).

A hospital run by the Burmese military government has stopped providing free medical services to HIV/AIDS sufferers, according to a person living with HIV/AIDS who was directly affected by the decision.

Tin Ko Ko said that HIV/AIDS sufferers who receive treatment at Rangoon Infectious Diseases Hospital—which has for several years provided free medical services, such as blood tests, laboratory analysis and x-rays, to HIV/AIDS sufferers—now have to pay for tests and are charged a “donation fee” to cover their treatment.

Patients who undergo x-rays or blood tests for laboratory analysis must now pay from 3,000 kyat (US \$2.3) to 4,000 kyat (\$3.1). They also have to put 500 kyat (\$0.39) in a donation box, he said.

The Rangoon Infectious Diseases Hospital announced that the new regulations started on January 21, 2008. The hospital said that HIV/AIDS patients would have to pay for services now that the group that previously supported the services had stopped funding.

“On Monday, several HIV/AIDS sufferers broke down in tears because they could not pay for their medical fees,” Tin Ko Ko said. “It clearly shows that the government cannot help HIV/AIDS patients without other supporting organizations.”

He added that most persons living with HIV/AIDS who came to the hospital for testing or treatment could only afford enough for transportation, food and basic living costs.

Tin Ko Ko is one of many HIV/AIDS sufferers who has been under the care of a National League for Democracy-affiliated welfare group. The group was led by well-known HIV/AIDS activist Phyu Phyu Thin, a member of the NLD who is now in hiding.

The welfare group has also been facing difficulties supplying antiretroviral (ARV) drugs to their patients since the September uprising as the military authorities have been hunting down and arresting many of its working members.

The NLD-affiliated group is now taking care of up to 600 people living with HIV/AIDS, including some 200 from other townships, according to Yazar, a volunteer who has now had to take on a leading role within the group since Phyu Phyu Thin went into hiding.

Yazar said that about 30 people are living in their two safe houses in Rangoon. The welfare group is not supported by any other non-government organization—it simply exists on donations from their patients, from NLD members and other private benefactors, such as actors, in the community.

The Rangoon Infectious Diseases Hospital, known locally as Wai Bar Gi, is one of the only hospitals in Burma providing ARV drugs to HIV/AIDS sufferers. No official from the hospital was available to comment to The Irrawaddy on Wednesday.

The AZG clinic, which is funded by the Dutch branch of Médecins sans Frontières, was the only other clinic known to be in a position to provide ARV drugs in Rangoon. However, in early January 2007, the AZG clinic was forced to stop accepting new HIV/AIDS patients due to budget limitations.

According to a World Health Organization report in November 2007, Burma has more than 339,000 people living with HIV/AIDS, one of the worst epidemics in Asia.

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\* From The Irrawaddy:

[http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=10017](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=10017)