

One doctor's silent sacrifice for drug addicts

Update: October, 08/2016 - 09:00



A medical worker disseminates information to fight HIV/AIDS for locals in Sin Suối Hồ commune in Phong Thổ District of Lai Châu Province. - VNA/VNS Photo Dương Ngọc

[Viet Nam News](#)

Nguyễn Hạnh

LAI CHÂU – Trần Đức Tình, a doctor in the mountainous district that is one the nation's poorest, has turned his hardscrabble upbringing into a calling: treating HIV/AIDS and fighting drug addiction.

As a head of the testing ward at Lai Châu's Centre for HIV/AIDS Prevention, Tinh balances his time between administering to STD patients and traveling around the region to identify and treat locals battling opiate addiction.

Growing up as the youngest child in a large family, he experienced the hunger and poverty familiar to so many Lai Châu locals.

“My family’s life was very hard, as it was for many households in my home town,” Tinh said.

“When I was young, I went to school in the morning, and in the afternoon I went to the forest— which was about 6km from my house—to find firewood. Then, I’d carry the wood back home before taking care of the corn field and helping my parents.”

Tinh’s indigent upbringing in a region known as a hotspot for drug addiction and HIV/AIDS infection inspired him to work toward a better life and toward the ability to help people in similar circumstances.

He therefore studied to become a doctor. But despite finding great satisfaction in his work at the HIV/AIDS center, Tinh concluded that a battle against drug addiction would require leaving his clinic and administering directly to the community.

The majority of drug users in Lai Châu are ethnic minorities with low literacy.

Because of the language barrier, communicating the benefits of methadone treatment was at first very difficult, Tinh said.

“I faced many obstacles accessing drug addicts. Divergence in language, customs and habits served as barriers to advising ethnic minorities here on fighting drug use,” the doctor said.

Initially, he had to communicate through native interpreters. However, after much hard work and many hours of studies, he can now communicate easily with ethnic minorities. He fluently shares his knowledge about healthcare and encourages drug users to try methadone treatment.

Helping addicts access methadone is not simple, however.

Drug users had to drink medicine on a strict schedule, and the health centre was very far from their communities, Tinh said.

In some cases, those seeking treatment had to drive their motorbike 30-40 km to reach the health centre to get medicine, Tinh added.

Many addicts could not afford the distance and gave up treatment, he said. Therefore, Tinh and his colleagues would travel to addicts’ houses to advise and encourage them to resume treatment.

“Sometimes, I have to use my motorbike to take them to the health

centre to access medicine and be tested,” said the doctor.

As a result, nearly 100 drug addicts in Mường Tè District’s Tà Tổng commune alone had undergone methadone treatment.

Tình said that in order to persuade drug users to use methadone and seek treatment, he sometimes lived, ate and worked with them.

“The treatment is especially hard when drug addicts are also addicted to alcohol. In some cases, they not only refuse to access treatment but also hit and expel me,” Tình said.

Results you can see

Normally, it takes about one month to start a methadone treatment process for a village. And with each month, Tình says he loves his job more.

Many households in Mường Tè Commune have escaped hunger and poverty thanks to the help of Tình and his colleagues.

Nậm Cùm village in Bum Nưa Commune was one of the poorest villages in the region a few years ago, but life here has changed.

Years ago, twenty-seven out of 28 households in the village had at least one drug user.

But under the guidance of Tình and his colleagues at the HIV/AIDS centre and health care centre, many addicts turned to methadone treatment.

A local drug user (who asked to remain anonymous) said treatment was very difficult, but his health was better thanks to methadone.

“A few years ago, my wife and I used drugs together. We spent all our money on drugs,” he said.

Many recovering addicts also stressed that the treatment allowed them to turn focus back to working and caring for their children.

Patients have given Tình maize, cassavas or dried bamboo shoots to thank him for his help.

“These things are invaluable gifts that not everyone receives,” Tình said.

After ten years working at the provincial HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Centre, he’s left his mark in even Lai Châu Province’s most

remote villages.

“Many people in this province are struggling with poverty and HIV. They need help,” Tinh said.

Even after the sun has set and the working day is officially over, one can find Tinh and his team on the way to addicts’ homes. There, you can count on him to offer advice, administer treatment, and offer hope for a brighter future. - VNS

TAGS: [methadone](#) [Lai Châu Province](#) [addiction](#)