



Pilot Project ROMAINFORMA: Information point for healthcare rights and Hepatitis B and C prevention

Start Date: November 2006

Duration: 2 years

Location: City of Rome

Implementing Agency: IMAGINE Onlus

Funding Entities: Compagnia di San Paolo private funders

IMGAINE's commitment to healthcare rights and prevention of infectious diseases are realized in the project ROMAINFORMA, which is located in Rome and in collaboration with the **Preventive Medicine Complex of Immigration, Tourism and Tropical Dermatology at the Istituto San Gallicano (IRCCS)**, and in cooperation with the Councillor of Child and Family Policy and Councillor Health and Social Policy for the City of Rome and the Region of Lazio Councillor of Health.

Background:

Hepatitis B is one of the most important public health problems worldwide. The World health Organization estimates that close to 2 billion people (almost one third of the world's population) have serological evidence of infection with the hepatitis B virus (HBV). It causes one million deaths every year – only smoking causes more deaths annually and is marked by an acute infection phase in the first six months, possibly followed by a chronic phase. Approximately 20% of all cases of chronic hepatitis progress (within ten years time) t Circa il 20% dei casi di epatite cronica progredisce nel giro di 10 anni verso la cirrosi epatica e circa il 2-3% dei casi di cirrosi epatica ogni anno progredisce verso il carcinoma epatocellulare.

There are currently approximately 180 million people infected with Hepatitis C (about 3% of the world's population), of which 140 million are chronic carriers of the disease. Approximately 20-35% of chronic Hepatitis C cases progress to cirrhosis (in a period of 10-30 years) and approximately 4-6% of all cases of cirrhosis develop into liver cancer.

The city of Rome is privy to migration from various countries. In many cases, however, these new immigrants arrive from countries which do not have universal vaccination policies for Hepatitis B, nor do they support any kind of national information campaign regarding viral hepatitis. This means that there are many adults and children who arrive in Italy already infected with the virus as a result of the lack of preventive health policies in their home country, and due to lack of information, do not avail themselves of the preventive services available to them in the community (free vaccinations for

infants and persons at risk, such as people living with infected individuals) and treatment available thanks to the national healthcare system (treatment for chronic hepatitis). The primary cause of the problem is lack of information available in various languages and lack of information and referrals for the services available in the community. This speaks to a very real need for information and more effective awareness and prevention campaigns for infectious diseases in the community.

General Objectives:

ROMAINFORMA was created to improve public health service access and reduce new cases of Hepatitis B and C, guaranteeing support and access to healthcare for everyone in Rome and Lazio.

The intervention method is duplicitous: on level informing and supporting clients of the various public health services available, on another level, supporting clients in the area of viral hepatitis prevention and healthcare access. There are two major motives of the project:

- Contribute to guarantee and defend the right to access healthcare for all citizens, and in particular, the right to healthcare for all mothers and children, thereby assuring democratic development in our multicultural and multiethnic society;
- Develop a replicable education and prevention project model.

Specific Objectives:

- Provide information regarding local public health services and healthcare rights
- Promotion of viral disease prevention through an awareness and information campaign, which provides information regarding the risks of Hepatitis B and C and other sexually transmitted diseases;
- Promotion of a network of local organizations and associations through direct contacts, working groups to help jump start participatory structures to exchange experiences between all actors involved.

Beneficiaries:

ROMAINFORMA provides necessary informational services regarding the transmission and evolution of Hepatitis B and C to everyone in Rome who may be at risk of contracting viral hepatitis, both citizens and immigrants, even those without a permit to stay or valid form of identification.



Activities:

ROMAINFORMA is available on-line via the IMAGINE website (www.imagine.org) and provides information regarding the project and services available, and all informational materials are available for free download.

Raising awareness regarding Hepatitis B and C prevention will also contribute to the general understanding regarding the transmission of other diseases, such as HIV. We are also planning meetings regarding viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), in collaboration with personnel from the Istituto San Gallicano and other non-profit organizations in the community. Through our partnerships in the local community, we anticipate the creation of a collaborative of civil society, international development and immigrant health organizations, which will work to better inform the population at risk regarding transmission of various infectious diseases and offer a more appropriate service.

At the end of the project, a Round Table meeting involving all partners (local authorities, public health structures, non-profit organizations, cooperatives, ASL, immigrant group organizations) will be convened to review project outcomes and exchange experiences, which will be used in the creation and publication of the final project document, detailing the projects experiences and results.

Partner:

Since 1985 the **Preventive Medicine Complex of Immigration, Tourism and Tropical Dermatology at the Istituto San Gallicano (IRCCS)** has been providing public health services to immigrants (with and without a permit to stay), travellers, homeless, the elderly and families with very low income, refugees, asylum seekers, victims of torture and anyone who is in need of public health services. Throughout the years, there have been various developments in the approach of the health care profession in treatment of these various populations, which are cost-effective and have successful diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitative outcomes. San Gallicano is composed of Preventive Medical Services for Migrants and Tropical Dermatology and Tourism Medicine. There are numerous collaborations with international health organizations, similar services outside of Italy, specifically, with the World Health Organization (WHO). In 2002, the WHO's Regional Office for Europe, after completing a case study of San Gallicano's service model, it was used as the Italian reference site for "Health and Poverty." The WHO has long stated that one of the public health priorities for numerous countries should be to reduce poverty and improve healthcare conditions for the most needy and marginalized populations¹. It is in this context that San Gallicano works, utilizing an interdisciplinary intervention method which allows for the development of a collaborative network between public structures and private entities, and the elaboration of a prevention strategy that is cost-effective

¹ **World Health Organization.** World Health Report 2003. *Shaping the future.* WHO, Geneva 2003.

and provides equal, universal and highly effective diagnostic and therapeutic services². The services are further enhanced through the usage of personnel, such as cultural-linguistic mediators, which serve an important function of socio-linguistic interpretation, providing more effective diagnostic-therapeutic services. The principal methods of preventive medical service are:

- primary and secondary prevention, diagnosis and treatment of internal, liver and gastroenterological diseases;
- health education that improves quality of life;
- improving access to public health services;
- development of healthcare personnel in the field of migrant medicine.

All adult internal diseases are diagnosed and treated. Liver diseases, viral hepatitis and digestive diseases are particular specialities. Particular attention is placed on the medicine of diet and nutrition, with numerous studies into eating and lifestyle and the availability of consultation and prescribed nutrition regimens. San Gallicano is also responsible for advances in female cancer prevention and the promotion of women's health in general, through collaboration with the Istituto Regina Elena. Additionally, psychology and psychiatric disturbances particular to the immigrant are also treated through an ethno-psychological and ethno-psychiatric approach.

Immigrants who do not possess a permit to stay are provided with a temporary National Insurance card with a STP (Temporarily Present Immigrant) code, which is valid for up to six months and renewable (according to the DL 286/98, under the Regolamento di Attuazione DPR 394/99, and n.5 del 24/03/2000 from the Ministry of Health). With this card, the user is able to access all public and private healthcare structures accredited by the National Health Service (SSN), including urgent and essential treatment of all diseases and injuries at clinics and hospitals, preventive interventions and all those interrelated.

² Nosotti L., Latini O., Fornari U., Buonomini I., Toma L., Franco G., Morrone A., Medicina Preventiva delle Migrazioni: Modelli a basso costo ed alta efficacia. *International Journal of Migration and Transcultural Medicine* 2006, N.2 – 82-92