

# Enhancement of Voluntary HIV Counseling and Testing System

## “Feel Free to Visit Us for HIV Testing and Counseling Services” New Collaboration Model in Sapporo

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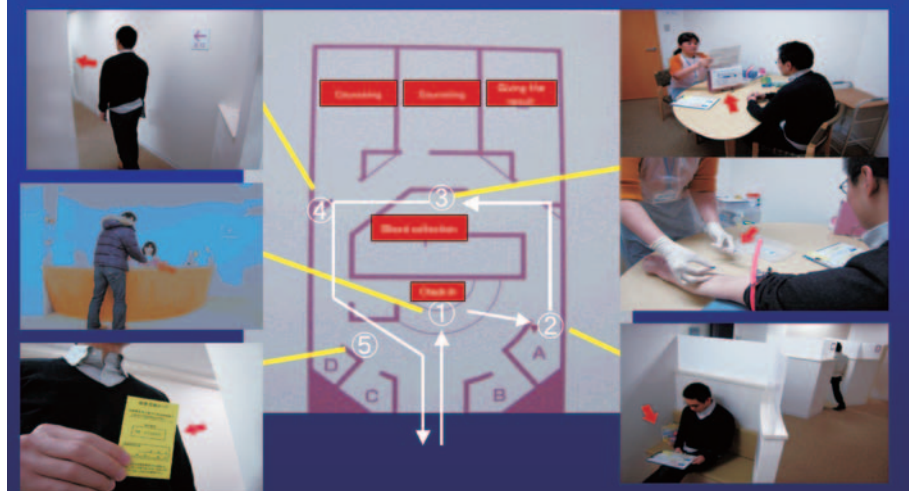
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“Circle Sapporo” opened in Sapporo City, Hokkaido, on December 1, 2007 (Saturday), which is observed as World AIDS Day. A center for HIV testing and counseling, it is operated, upon request from Sapporo City, by HABATAKI Welfare Project, a nonprofit social welfare organization established primarily by victims of drug-induced AIDS (plaintiffs of the HIV lawsuit in Tokyo).

Circle Sapporo is located on the seventh floor of a building that is adjacent to Tokyu Hands in downtown Sapporo. As a center for HIV testing and counseling, its layout is designed such that it provides a friendly and clean ambiance owing to the circular aisle that extends from the entrance door to each room. At the check-in counter, a visitor is required to confirm his/her appointment and is provided with a brief explanation about the test; the visitor is also required to take the next appointment for receiving the test results. Subsequently, the visitor is expected to sit in a waiting room, which is further ahead along the circular aisle. Here, the visitor can review the explanations provided earlier at the check-in counter. Next, the visitor follows the circular aisle to another room where he/she is again informed, this time by a nurse, of the test and the test flow. Upon consent, his/her blood is collected by a volunteer doctor. From here, the visitor then goes to a counseling room, again along the aisle, where he/she receives counseling. At the end of this circular aisle is an exit door. The testing and counseling services are provided in the rooms along the circular aisle; although the rooms are open, the privacy that is guaranteed along with the absence of psychological barriers ensures that the visit is comfortable. The testing and counseling services at the center are available every Saturday from 1600–1900 hrs. Prior to its official opening, the center was visited by the media in Hokkaido for its new approach to combat HIV and AIDS. As a result of the considerable coverage by newspapers and TV stations, the appointment calendar was completely booked (up to 20 people) from the first day into the second week.

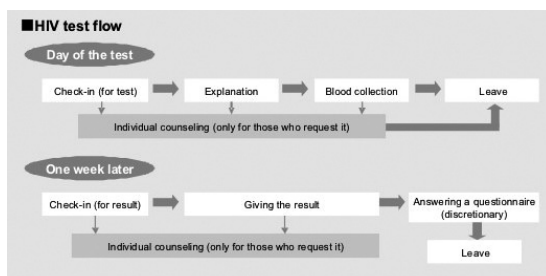
The management of this center is driven by the drug-induced AIDS victims’ strong desire to help. Most of these victims are enduring the hardships resulting from the HIV infection and are struggling to combat this incurable infectious disease. The primary goal of these victims is to arrest the spread of the

## “Circle Sapporo” Testing Flow



infection and to enable people to take adequate action to protect their health as well as the health of their loved ones. HABATAKI Welfare Project was founded 10 years ago; last year, it became a second-tier nonprofit social welfare organization, authorized by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). It intends to provide social support based on the experiences and expertise learned through its relief efforts, while providing relief to the victims themselves who reached an out-of-court settlement 11 years ago. Campaigns for HIV prevention and testing and counseling services have thus far been organized mainly by the central and local governments. As a government-authorized welfare organization, we, the Hokkaido branch of HABATAKI Welfare Project, had for a long time desired to open a center for HIV testing and counseling based on the concept that it is important to create an atmosphere where people who suspected that they were infected are able to receive testing and counseling services more conveniently and where public awareness about the importance of these tests can be raised.

The center is aimed at providing an environment where people who suspect that they are infected can receive testing and counseling services along with follow-up support and clarifications as part of the counseling system. Public health centers that focus on providing testing services certainly play a significant role; however, we believed that



it was necessary to establish a new, positive, and nonstereotype center based on the new social trends. We actively negotiated with MHLW, Hokkaido University Hospital, Hokkaido government, Sapporo City government, and with local NGOs to establish this center. Many of them offered their consent and support. In particular, the internal medicine staff at the Hokkaido University Hospital as well as MHLW

and Sapporo City government respected the will and intentions of the HIV/AIDS sufferers. We were able to set up an advisory committee including local NGO members to repeatedly discuss methods to reduce the psychological barriers of the people who fear the infection when they visit the center to receive testing and counseling services. Their advice with regard to the operations of Circle Sapporo, including the choice of location, facilities, equipment and, most importantly, staff equipped to provide visitors with a sense of security, peace, and trust, considerably benefited us.

Through the operations of the center, we intend to prevent the onset of AIDS by eliminating the fear of HIV infection at an early stage and monitoring the health of infected people during the early stages. Circle Sapporo is an embodiment, through the power of the citizens, of the strong will of the HIV/AIDS sufferers to manage a testing and counseling facility and provide an atmosphere where people can intimately understand the importance of health and of protecting the health of their loved ones, while receiving testing and counseling services.

Circle Sapporo successfully opened on December 1, 2007. Its successful opening can be attributed to the intensive efforts of and support from the staff of the local NPO Red Ribbon Sapporo, the medical staff of Hokkaido University Hospital and Sapporo Medical University Hospital, the government staff, and the volunteers who strongly supported the mission of the center. Further, everyone was equally involved in the publicity of the center by creating awareness about it among people. In addition, we are grateful to MHLW for supporting the project as a new type of effort to combat AIDS as well as to the Sapporo City government for providing us with its utmost support in establishing the center. The Hokkaido government, which was initially reluctant to provide support to our project, eventually supported us as the project moved forward.

On November 29, 2007, a couple of days before the opening, we met with mayor of Sapporo and informed him of the opening. Further, we informed him of our strong desire to arrest the spread of HIV infection through our efforts as an organization managed directly by HIV/AIDS sufferers. Mr. Takao Koike, a professor at the Second



Department of Internal Medicine of Hokkaido University Hospital, who graciously promised to provide full medical support to our project, expressed to the mayor his desire to reduce the number of patients

who have already developed AIDS at the time of testing by increasing the ratio of HIV test recipients to the total population; the ratio in Hokkaido is lower than the national average. Eight large signboards of Circle Sapporo have been placed along the main boulevard in Sapporo City. They were erected with the support from many construction companies involved in the construction of the city subway system.

On December 7, 2007, a week after the opening, we celebrated the opening of the HIV testing and counseling center (at Hotel Polestar Sapporo) to express our gratitude to people who supported us. Nearly 60 people gathered for the celebrations where we gave diplomas of appreciation to Kumamoto Construction and Design Co. for providing the marvelous design of the center free of charge as well as to a consortium of construction companies involved in the construction of the city subway system that helped build the signboards for Circle Sapporo. The center has laid a significant groundwork for the HABATAKI Welfare Project to continue to provide relief to the victims and to promote public welfare, keeping in mind the suffering of the drug-induced AIDS victims.

We invited many guests to Circle Sapporo on the morning of December 8, 2007, which was the day of the second testing and counseling service. Many people including the staff from MHLW, Hokkaido government, and medical institutions visited the center.

We hope to tackle new challenges through collaboration with many relevant people based on the following message:

“Stop HIV infection. Protect our health and the health of our loved ones. Let us take care of our health together.”

*The above was excerpted from “KOUSEIROUDOU (Monthly Journal of Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare), January 2008”.*