

NAMRU-6 Supports DOD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program in Honduras and El Salvador

By NAMRU-6 Public Affairs Office

LIMA, Peru– Senior Research Physician from U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No. 6 (NAMRU-6) provides DOD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP) support in Honduras and El Salvador to organize the Stigma and Discrimination (S&D) Reduction in the Armed Forces Health Services TOT (Training of Trainers) Workshop.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has invested in reducing the global health threat of the HIV epidemic since 2001 through funding from the Defense Health Program and from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Over the past 15 years, the DHAPP has successfully supported partner militaries around the world through prevention, care, and treatment efforts. This support has made a substantial impact on the epidemic within partner military ranks. The United Nation's 2018 High-Level Meeting on Ending AIDS included "Elimination of HIV-related discrimination" as one of its targets to achieve by 2020. HIV-related stigma and discrimination lead to substandard health care, coercion and violence, loss of employment, and social exclusion and are human rights violations, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dr. Silvia Montano, Medical Research Physician at NAMRU-6, recently provided support to DHAPP at the Central Military Hospitals in Tegucigalpa, Honduras and San Salvador, El Salvador in November 2019. Her work was part of a three-day intense "train the trainer" workshop to reduce the stigma and discrimination of HIV in Partner Nation armed forces, and enhance health security cooperation in the region.

"To control the HIV epidemic and achieve an AIDS-free generation, it is necessary to identify and understand the complex dynamics driving stigma and discrimination," and "implement innovative, military-led approaches to address the specific types of stigma (experienced, perceived, anticipated, internalized, compound or layered, secondary), and to address the structural and policy level barriers that perpetuate discrimination," Dr. Montano said.



Montano expressed that the most rewarding part of this work is to observe the change of attitude in military staff, who are increasingly keen to seek diagnosis and treatment. "Living with HIV is no longer a synonym of death," she said. Dr. Montano is also working with DHAPP in Peru and Colombia to provide technical assistance to Partner Nation militaries in the SOUTHCOM AOR through training on counseling, laboratory, clinical management, policy, partner notification, and reduction of stigma in military health service.

"There is a better service free of stigma and discrimination, but also with dignity and empathy," Montano said.

December is World AIDS month, an opportunity to unite in the fight against HIV and show support for those living with HIV.

NAMRU-6 has a long-standing agreement with the Peruvian Navy that dates back to 1983. Hosted by the Peruvian Navy and co-located at their flagship hospital in Lima, and also at the

Naval Clinic in Iquitos and in Puerto Maldonado, NAMRU-6 conducts research on and surveillance of a wide range of infectious diseases of military or public health significance in the region, including malaria and dengue fever, yellow fever, viral encephalitides, leishmaniasis, and enteric diseases such as shigellosis and typhoid fever, as well as anti-microbial resistance monitoring.