

Case-Studies

Case Study1

BACKGROUND

The first case dealt with the Phase III efficacy studies on AIDSVAX conducted by VaxGen (a California based biotechnology company) in Thailand. VaxGen started the recruitment of 2,500 participants in March 1999. Thailand was chosen because: 1) there was a strong professional relationship between VaxGen and Thai researchers, 2) the HIV virus strains present in Thailand are homogenous, and 3) WHO/UNAIDS supported infrastructure development to conduct vaccine trials and UNAIDS/CDC supported cohort development in the country. As a condition for participation, the Thai government required: 1) that the vaccine tested have a reasonable likelihood of preventing infection for the particular strains of the virus most prevalent in the country, and 2) that the country receive research benefit in two forms – the product itself and capacity building.

DISCUSSION

The various groups that discussed the case observed that the Thai experience could be applicable to other countries, except where they have not had a comparable research experience, or where ethics committees were not yet in place. The following comments were also made by some of the discussants:

1. In this particular case it would have been more desirable for the community to have participated actively in the review process, and for it to be involved in continuing dialogue for the duration of the research,
2. A letter of intent such as that which was adverted to in the case would not have been legally binding, but the feeling of mutual trust was much more important,
3. If the specific components of “technology transfer” were not clarified, the commitment to the concept could have been meaningless, and
4. The successful experience suggests an opportunity to explore related south-south collaboration to maximize possible gain.