



## Building Capacity to Fight the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Guatemala

In recent years, in the aftermath of outbreaks and other international crises, CDC has responded to requests from governments around the world for epidemiologic, laboratory, and research assistance. However, most of these efforts were limited in scope and duration and were not integrated into a larger effort to build public health capacity. CDC's international public health partners look to CDC to provide technical assistance and guidance as they develop and strengthen their own public health systems and workforces. CDC developed its Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) to help foreign countries develop and implement dynamic public health strategies to improve and strengthen their public health systems.

In 2004, CDC's Global AIDS Program (GAP) partnered with FETP to bolster the limited HIV/AIDS epidemiology and surveillance capacity in Central America. Dr. Judith Garcia, a general practitioner at Hospital San Vicente in Guatemala City, was the ideal candidate for the FETP. In 1990, when she cared for her hospital's first AIDS patient, many believed that HIV-infected patients should be quarantined. Garcia campaigned successfully for a special clinic and more resources for HIV-positive patients. Other Guatemalan hospitals started referring their HIV and AIDS patients to Garcia, and by 1996, she was treating over 100 patients a year.

As a result of her work, Garcia became Guatemala's representative in the HIV/AIDS cohort of the FETP program. The two-year, full-time training and service program combines classroom instruction with field assignments. Students conduct epidemiologic investigations and field surveys, evaluate surveillance systems, perform disease control and prevention measures, inform their countries' decision-makers, and train other health workers.



**Dr. Judith Garcia, a CDC GAP FETP graduate from Guatemala, examines a patient**

Since graduating from the program, Garcia has trained other epidemiologists at the National AIDS Program, the Ministry of Health, hospitals, and non-governmental organizations. After serving on a commission to create Guatemala's National Center for Epidemiology in order to monitor diseases, Garcia was then assigned to the Center as the epidemiologist for STIs, HIV/AIDS and TB.

CDC's Central American Regional Office has implemented the FETP program in eight countries. The region's sixty-four FETP graduates have conducted over 150 surveillance evaluations, 177 outbreak investigations, and 3120 planned investigations since the program's inception in 2001. And, like Dr. Garcia, many have risen to leadership positions in their countries, with several CDC FETP graduates now serving as their nations' Ministry of Health Epidemiology Directors.

For more information about CDC at Work, please contact us at (202) 245-0600 or go to <http://www.cdc.gov/washington/>.