Break the silence

Susan’s story
A community’s response to HIV

Let’s talk HIV

Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network
In spite of the many efforts by various stakeholders to fight back HIV, the disease continues to take its toll around the world. For those living with the disease, understanding it is key to staying healthy. For those who aren’t infected, an important key to staying that way is to get equipped with information with all its aspects, including infection, prevention, care and treatment. This series of EPN comic strips presents messages on various HIV issues that everyone should know about.

These comic strips were developed by EPN to provide information to the general public, through graphic art. This edition is also available in French.

Getting to Zero:
Zero new HIV infections
Zero AIDS related deaths
Zero stigma and discrimination

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EPN wishes to thank its partners for supporting the development of these strips.

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The Church’s role in encouraging people living with HIV

Clinical tests for HIV patients
At the hospital pharmacy

Madam Susan, how are you feeling? I’m the pharmacist here. Have a seat.

ARVs are a treatment and not a cure for HIV. Taking ARVs will significantly reduce the chances of transmitting the virus to your baby. The medicines you have been prescribed are safe for use in pregnancy.

You need to keep in mind that for ARVs to be effective, you must take them in the correct dose, daily and on time as prescribed. You can put reminders in your phone or get other people to help you remember.

Side effects like rashes, diarrhoea and vomiting do occur and sometimes people get even more severe reactions. If you experience anything unusual, come back to the hospital immediately.

What about side effects?

Can I take herbal medicines to supplement ARVs? I remember hearing that there are some that are effective.

I would discourage that. They’re not scientifically proven. ARVs are clinically tested and proven to improve quality of life of HIV patients.

The way they are advertised, you would swear that they make a difference.

Some of them do relieve certain symptoms. But, before you take any, speak with your doctor.

Three months later, Pastor Sam and Susan bump into each other at the shopping centre

Good to see you. How are you getting on?

I have been taking the ARVs but my heart is still troubled. Ah, here comes Mama A, she always calls to remind me to take my ARVs.

My friend, I was just talking to pastor about you, my reliable support system for staying on treatment.

You know it’s hard to take medicines every day. Without her I would have given up.

I am happy to hear this. It’s important to have community members support adherence.

Pastor, you know I am not a counsellor. There are more qualified people in the Church.

Giving support is not about qualifications. As long as you can encourage a patient like you are doing for Susan, the doctors will do the rest.

That’s true. See how far you have brought me. You could change many lives with your caring and kind heart.

Well! I have so many things to do. But if it would be just once a week, I feel good joining people of the church.

Wonderful. I’ll also try to get some village mates to help.

ARVs and pregnancy

Adherence and support
Creating awareness to get tested and seek treatment

At the opening of a local HIV drop-in centre by the Minister of Health.

I am glad to bring HIV services closer to the people of this community. This morning, I will speak about HIV. How many of you know your HIV status?

Getting tested reduces the spread of the virus. You get information about prevention of infection and about the treatment of HIV.

Expectant mothers should be tested early. A pregnant woman can pass on HIV to her unborn child if not treated.

Ministry of Health

HIV drop-in centre

What treatment is she talking about? HIV has no cure.

Although HIV has no cure, the virus can be controlled with antiretroviral therapy. With this treatment, an HIV-positive person can live a normal life like me.

In the past, people thought they could be cured. But this is not possible. HIV has no cure.

I cannot be sure of your HIV status until you are tested. We have Susan here to share her testimony.

She looks very healthy and strong. She can’t have HIV!

Is this HIV? I thought people who look healthy like me cannot have HIV... until that day that I tested positive. It was a shock. But learning my status has helped me take care of my health and that of my baby.

This facility will offer free information about HIV, also counseling and testing services and anyone needing medicines will be referred appropriately. How many of you will use the services?

Although HIV has no cure, the virus can be controlled with antiretroviral therapy. With this treatment, an HIV-positive person can live a normal life like me.

There are many medicines on the market that can help you live a normal life. But you have to use them properly.

After the funeral of Mama Tata’s friend.

Sorry for the loss. Maybe she should have continued taking ARVs even after the pastor’s intervention. I hear those medicines must be taken for life once started.

My friend had been a pastor. He told her to stop taking her ARVs, that God has healed her. Now she has passed away.

God’s earnest desire is for all to live an abundant healthy life. Medicines are a gift from God to make the healing more effective. Let’s catch up with Pastor Sam. I guess he can better explain this.

Pastor, what would you say about miracle healing?

Does God’s healing miracle really work?

I am now on treatment which will help protect my baby from getting infected and I can also live longer to take care of him. That’s why it is important to get tested early.

Religious healing can be dangerous. Faith in God should go hand in hand with faith in medicines as both are His creations. Anyone taking ARVs should not stop taking them unless the doctor advises so.

What treatment is she talking about? HIV has no cure.

Religious healing can be dangerous. Faith in God should go hand in hand with faith in medicines as both are His creations. Anyone taking ARVs should not stop taking them unless the doctor advises so.

Thank you for enlightening us. I wish my friend had someone to give her this information.

Tell my friends, now that you know the truth, don’t let another life be lost!
THE SAVE COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK

For a very long time the response to HIV and AIDS has been focused on the ABC approach to prevention (Abstinence, Being Faithful to one partner, and Condom use). While this has worked in the past, there is need to focus on a broader strategy, which incorporates ABC and other focus areas. SAVE is this new and all inclusive strategy. SAVE provides a more holistic and non-judgmental approach to HIV by incorporating the principles of ABC, whilst addressing its gaps and confronting all structural drivers of the epidemic. SAVE stands for:

S - Safer Practices
A - Access to Treatment
V - Voluntary Testing and Counselling
E - Empowerment

The SAVE approach advocates that we multiply Safer Practices, Access to Treatment, Nutrition, Voluntary Counseling and Testing and Empowerment of all communities.

The SAVE approach also involves an analysis of the main factors underlying the HIV epidemic, identified as:

S: Stigma,
S: Shame,
D: Denial,
D: Discrimination,
I: Inaction,
M: Mis-action.

These six factors are summarized as SSDDIM. Overcoming the HIV pandemic cannot be achieved without eliminating SSDDIM associated with the virus.

Why SAVE?
1. SAVE promotes the inclusion of PLHIV and is seen by PLHIV as a message of hope geared to Prevention, care, support and treatment.
2. It is an enabling framework that provides for dissemination of information on a range of aspects surrounding HIV (One stop Shop)
3. SAVE incorporates both sexual and non sexual modes of HIV transmission
4. SAVE addresses stigma and discrimination
5. SAVE is an integrated approach to health messaging
6. SAVE usurps dialogue on most health issues and much more

For treatment of opportunistic infections especially TB:
Access to good nutrition and clean water
Adherence to treatment
Access to anti-retroviral therapy for adults and children
Access to quality medical supplies and infrastructure
 Palliative and home based care
Access to pathological tests

Access to stigma and routine free testing
Confidential testing
Prevent danger of late diagnosis
Advocate for VCT access
Testing for serodiscordancy
Empowerment of all communities
Greater focus on youth and children
Gender mainstreaming
Access to Gender appropriate information
Empower women and girls with a goal to promote gender equality
Promote social transformation
Meaningful involvement and inclusion of PLHIV and affected communities
Economic Empowerment and support for PLHIV
Empowerment on Sexual & Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

The World Council Churches

The World Council of Churches Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative in Africa (WCC-EHAI) works with Churches and Theological Institutions, to build their capacity, and competency in HIV response.

WCC-EHLAI is one of the most evolving entities working on HIV in Africa. EHAI is where people are, together with people. It formulates questions and together with people it finds answers. EHAI listens and learns, it reflects and studies. It consults and it exposes new ideas and issues. It takes the tough issues by the horns, and is neutral and non judgemental. It creates safe spaces where people can have a dialogue without fear.

We focus on:

Reduced Stigma and Discrimination

a) Prevention, Stigma, care and Support
b) Contextual Bible Study

Transformed life affirming Theology

a) Culture, Religion and Sexuality
b) Masculinity, Femininity and Sexual Gender Based Violence

Increased Capacity of Churches to respond effectively and compassionately

a) Mainstreaming HIV Competence in Churches and Theological institutions
b) Publications

Are you a church or an institution struggling with issues of SGBV, HIV and sexualities? Would you like to assistance as to how to respond compassionately and competently? For Contextual Bible Study TOT, facilitation for seminars, workshops and talks in your church or institution; please contact:
The Revd Pauline Warjiro Njiru, Eastern Africa Regional Coordinator Tel: +254 721 858 714 email address: pnjiru@wckenya.org
Preventing HIV transmission

Stigma and discrimination

After a women’s group meeting at Pastor Sam’s house

People living with HIV suffer more when discriminated. In fact, most die not from the disease but mainly due to lack of love and support from others. My husband is here to tell us more about the issue.

HIV is a virus and not a moral issue. People get infected in a number of different ways including blood transfusion and transmission from mother to child. Stigma and discrimination of HIV-infected persons is wrong.

Knowing the facts about HIV and AIDS helps us to accept those who are infected and affected.

How does stigma affect people living with HIV?

Stigma can manifest through rejection, neglect, denial of certain privileges such as education or job. It can also manifest when there are certain stereotypes and names attached to the HIV-positive people by friends, community or family.

No one likes to live in fear. With our support, HIV patients can live fulfilling lives and help reduce the spread of the disease.

Stigma works against prevention, care and support for people living with HIV. It denies them the opportunity of living a long and healthy life.

A session on HIV prevention for high school students about to graduate

Today we will discuss about HIV prevention. HIV can be transmitted in 5 main ways: sexual transmission, transmission by blood and from mother to child.

The first step is engage in safe practices such as abstaining from sex, drugs and alcohol, using a condom, being faithful to one partner whose status you know, not sharing needles or body piercing gadgets and screening blood before transfusion.

The second step is to get counseling and testing of HIV. If your diagnosis is positive, it is important to consider the third step of seeking treatment of HIV. It is also necessary to seek treatment when opportunistic infections present. Treatment can reduce chances of infecting your partner.

The fourth step of preventing HIV transmission is knowing how HIV is transmitted, how it can be prevented, and about treatment, care and support.

Another step is in caring for and supporting people living with HIV. Support encourages testing, access to treatments and positive living.

Counselor, I heard that male circumcision reduces the risk of female to male transmission significantly.

That is true. Voluntary medical male circumcision reduces the risk of female to male transmission significantly.
A session during an HIV and AIDS community outreach programme.

HIV affects all dimensions of a person’s life and can create negative emotions such as anger, denial, depression, self-hate and fear of death. Supporting HIV-positive people helps them cope with the illness.

When supported, HIV positive people are able to overcome fear and anxieties that result from HIV infection.

It also encourages them to accept their status, seek medication and stay on it.

HIV patients can get support from family and friends, support groups, churches, the hospital and the community in general.

In my support group, we share experiences, learn about HIV and get emotional support.

Care and support of HIV positive persons helps in prevention. It encourages others to get tested and access HIV treatment services without fear.

Yes, one also benefits from counseling and can learn how to live a long and healthy life.

Maintaining the health status of an HIV+ person may be expensive. Financial support from family and friends is necessary to sustain treatment and good nutrition.

Access to relevant facts, having the confidence to make good choices and economic empowerment will ensure people living with HIV live fulfilled lives.

 claims of HIV cures have led to misconception. Many HIV positive persons go off their ART to pursue the alternative cures. Some of these complimentary or alternative medicines have harmful side effects.

Herbal or nutritional therapies may interact with ARVs, making them less effective or worsening their side effects. No matter how great their appeal, it is important to approach alternative therapies with caution and to get a doctor’s opinion like you did.

In that case my decision is not to use the herbs at all. I’ll give my ARVs a chance.

Susan is on her way to the prenatal clinic.

Good that you brought them. There are so many quacks out there offering alternative medicines, claiming to cure HIV. These medicines could have serious consequences on health.

But some people say that they feel better after taking the herbs.

It’s likely some of them are beneficial but since they are not clinically proven, their effectiveness and safety are not guaranteed. ARVs are the only clinically proven medicines to prolong the life of HIV patients.

Hi Susan, how are you getting on with your treatment?

It has not been easy taking medicines everyday but I haven’t missed a dose. These are the herbs I had talked to you about earlier.

Good to see you. How was the consultation?

Care and support for people living with HIV.
30 years of strengthening pharmaceutical services in church health systems

Professionalism and good governance
Institutional strengthening through capacity building and distribution of tools to impact governance
Training on pharmacy for health facility staff as well as provision of guidelines and standards to strengthen pharmacy practice.

Access to medicines
Addressing supply systems, medicine use, quality of medicines, pharmaceutical care and affordability.

Campaign against antimicrobial resistance
Activities on rational use of antibiotics and implementation of hospital-based infection control interventions reached more than 500 health professionals in 9 countries in 2010.

HIV and AIDS Treatment Literacy Guide for Church Leaders available in English and French.
EPN also offers Treatment Literacy Courses for Church Leaders on invitation from any church or other group.

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