



TO KNOW OR NOT TO KNOW: THE RISK OF STIGMA FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS

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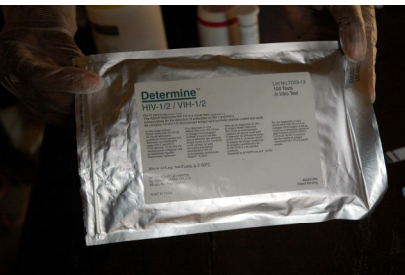
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In my last newsletter, I wrote about the importance of counseling and testing for HIV. Since then I came across an article titled, "Fear of HIV testing keeps pregnant women at home" (IRIN/Plus News 22 October 2008.) "I normally just deliver at home with the help of traditional birth attendants, because when you go to these modern government hospitals they put you through certain tests which reveal even your HIV status," states one woman. "I fear this, because I have seen other women chased away by their husbands after testing positive to HIV." According to the article, she still does not know her status.



I just returned from a trip to Uganda in preparation for the second HIV/AIDS discovery tour of Uganda, Malawi and Zambia. As one of CRWRC's partner staff pointed out, the importance of voluntary counseling and testing can not be over stated..

He had only learned of his HIV positive status after his wife developed complications during pregnancy; they are both now on ARV treatment.



Today he encourages people in his community to get tested and know their HIV status, but the Major challenge continues to be the fear of stigma associated with HIV. In fact, the 2007 Kenya AIDS Indicator Survey (KAIS) found that of all HIV infected participants in the survey, 26 percent reported themselves uninfected, while an additional 56 percent of had never been voluntarily tested for the



disease (<http://www.hivforum.org/uploads/KAIS%20Delegation%20Final,%20Washington%20Oct%2006%20and%207.pdf>.)

During an HIV and AIDS brain storming session with the Uganda country team, stigma was seen as a major issue that needs to be addressed in CRWRC programs. One of my colleagues noted the important role that the Church can play in responding to HIV and AIDS. "We need to bring church leaders together to address not only HIV and AIDS, but the link between development work and church planting," he said.

Speaking of church leaders, what do you suppose church leaders might go through when they or one of their family members comes out with an HIV positive result? What would you do if one of your daughters, sons, brother or sister came home and told you he or she was HIV positive? Would you want to know how he got the virus? Would you hold him in your arms and wish the virus away?



Would you hide in your closet and cry your eyes out wishing this bad dream were over? Would you want other people to know of his HIV result?

When faced with the reality of an HIV positive result of a loved one, many of us want to run away from reality and wish the whole situation away. As much as we may want to keep quiet and shield the family member, the big question comes up sooner or later: "How did you get HIV?"

Well, I almost went into my personal discovery in this quarter. I promise to share my experience in the next newsletter.

In His service,
Nema



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