

A BEGUILING ENCOUNTER

A. INTRODUCTION

HIV/AIDS as a pandemic disease has and is taking the precious lives of many people, specially the youth. Though, the swiftly increasing number of HIV/AIDS cases in Africa and India has drawn the attention of many governments and various organizations as well. It is still taking its toll in wiping out considerable number of people. Yet little efforts are being done to educate the youth.

Scientists have discovered the anti-retroviral drugs that can prolong the life of people living with HIV/AIDS. So far however they are not able to invent a vaccine or medicine that can completely prevent the disease. Medical scientist told us that HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a retrovirus that infects cells of the human immune system. It is widely accepted that infection with HIV causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), a disease characterized by the destruction of the immune system.

Efforts are being done to invent vaccine. However it may take years before any effective drug will cure millions of people.

HIV/AIDS cases live in our society where secrecy inhibits communications. The stigma is quite strong that the society ostracizes them. It is hard to admit that people are dying of HIV/AIDS. The common excuse is Tuberculosis, and other wind borne diseases.

The fact that little efforts are exerted to educate the youth the self-prevention attitude is fading away. More and younger people are perishing by HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is tragic scene the world has witnessed in the last decade of the last century and beyond in the twenty first century. It appears that the youth is living in a vicious circle. Unless there is a strong communication system and advocacy to educate and change the attitude of the youth, HIV/AIDS will continue its deadly strike for generations to come.

B. EDUCATING THE YOUTH ABOUT HIV/AIDS

B.1. *Causes and manifestations of HIV/AIDS. Lecture series by professionals aided by Cases studies*

Unlike the many commonly known diseases, according to my observations as non-medical personnel, HIV/AIDS manifests itself surreptitiously in different forms. In fact it is not diseases as such but a means to a disease. It camouflages itself in TB, influenza, and what have you. Such diagnosis complicates the understanding of the people in my community to accept it as clinically diagnosed diseases.

Therefore, it will be essential that professionals in the field to educate the people by organizing various lecture series. Basically the people see patients suffering from TB, and other wind borne diseases such as influenza or common cold. They do not see HIV/AIDS patients as such. Thus, it will be advantageous to conduct a lecture series aided by practical examples and make the people feel it. It will be an effort of a strong communication channel.

Education is an art instilling knowledge in one's mind, for that we need great educators. A selective screening has to be enforced in order to identify and select the best educators. Good material incentive must be provided for these educators. It is common to observe that because of the financial incentives involved, there is a scramble to educate.

A knowledge not effectively shared will not hit the intended target. It will instead be a waste of time, money and above all the loss of the would-be educated. The impact of great educators should be carefully assessed and it should be admired. A learned person who can effectively instill "Change" is an expensive person. The youth or any other person will

follow a charismatic leader or a popular educator.

B.2. Making Communication work in an environment

Where secrecy inhibits communication

He was a family man with successful career in his mid forties, my family's friend. We knew him as tuberculosis patient. He was under close medical treatment for five months in the hospital. The patient was emaciated and completely bedridden. He used to take heavy drugs, daily, under medical personnel supervision. The patient did not recover as expected by his family and friends. With no apparent improvement doctors advised him to continue taking his medication at home. When he was told to go home psychologically his family and friends showed a sign of delight expecting that he will fully recover. The patient stayed for about two months at home. He never showed signs of improvement. Finally he passed away. His wife and two children survive him.

Literally his family and friends did not know his case. However rumors started to circulate speculating that it could be HIV/AIDS. People know as a home centered, generous and social. He was not known as reckless or flirting with women. The fallacy is therefore no one would believe that he might have contracted HIV/AIDS if told so. It takes a one happy moment for that to happen.

Culturally in our society matters are preferred to be kept in secrecy. People will extraordinarily resist hunger than to move out to beg. It is quite common to pretend that one has the basic necessities in life, than to be known that one lacks even some. There is strong steadfastness. The sayings go "show yourself up at all costs even at the expense of filling your stomach with cheap food". Such is the extraordinary secrecy that has blindfolded the minds of our people strongly thereby inhibiting communication. Making my country as one of the nation with the highest number of HIV/AIDS cases. It is common to express; "what will people say of me, him, her, us, etc". No one will even come out to be famous.

HIV/AIDS is literally related with committing of adultery, prostitution and sex before marriage. It is very much detested by the society ethically and religiously. In such circumstance there is an acute fear of exposure for one will abhor outright ostracism.

One will therefore ask how one can make communication work in a society where secrecy inhibits communication. Well, there will be the need for a strong and arduous journey to achieve the goal. I am of the opinion that many discussion forums should be formed. Experienced orators or advocates should intelligently lead the form. Motivating material rewards must be offered to extroverts. Introverts should also be encouraged to enjoy the art of communication and exchange of ideas. The group should believe that an individual must not gamble by his life because of unreasonable secrecy. Efforts should be done to break the ice and to scratch off the obsession of secrecy as a taboo.

Understandably education is an evolutionary process. It is rather difficult to bring about a change in short while. With little or no educated youngsters, who would not admit the very existence of the disease, will be on a high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. The loss of the young generation is a deadly blow to the country. Change will be inevitable if there is an unflinching effort to communicate with the people through education. Education can bring about a change in one's life. The essence of learning can be adopted and implemented by those who have changed.

B.3 Persuading People Living With HIV/AIDS To Expose Themselves And Advise Their Peers.

Basically people in our society have developed a denying factor to the very existence of HIV/AIDS pandemic. Some even interpret it superstitiously and visit waterfalls where it is believed that the place is blessed with holy waters. It is a sacred place under the management and supervision of religious organizations. Patients usually stay between one to two weeks. They have to take cold shower as early as 4 a.m. and on occasion

they are immersed in the nearby pond or lake within the environment of the holy waters.

In the event there is provisional recovery. People believe that they have been completely cured. Upon return to their home they spread the words that the holy place in that particular region is fantastic. They inform their visitors that they have been cured of say of the debilitating diseases. Still there will not be any word of HIV/AIDS. As a result they strongly advise people to visit the places. Because of the near absolute secrecy involved defining the causes of death vary. Many people specially the youth are seen to untimely pass away.

Although there are no officially recorded statistics, the number of deaths of the youth is rapidly increasing.

People who have been told that either they are HIV carriers or have AIDs. Yet such people will not dare to appear publicly in the Television or other mass media channel. Only one or two courageous carriers have appeared in closed meetings. Yet these people could not dare to appear in public form such as TV or other mass media channel. The reason is because people are afraid of stigma and ostracism.

Culturally it is quite a disgrace for the people and their families to be branded as HIV/AIDS cases. There is also the religious ethics committing adultery, prostitution, illegitimate children, pregnancy out of wedlock etc. In a strongly religious society coupled with the attitude of steadfastness it will rather be difficult to break the barriers of communication. I believe that well-established educational programs coupled with material rewards can motivate people living with HIV/AIDS to appear in public and teach their fellow citizens.

*B.4 Educating Government officials and seeking
Access to government controlled mass media
channels*

The emphasis of educating the youth on HIV/AIDS is rather overlooked by government officials. As a result very little information is given in government controlled television and newspapers. HIV/AIDS is regarded as a political issue and they would rather refrain from providing appropriate programs and or columns.

Further more they would not allow public forum for discussions. I am of the opinion that strong lobby should be exercised to educate government officials. It is only when they change that they will realize the need of educating the youth and the rest of the community. They have to know that by covering up matters they will simply aggravate the situation and be the cause of untold disasters. There is a saying in our culture, "The one who hides his wound will realize that the medicine will remain hidden". It is to say that unless you reveal your wound or sickness you may not find the medicine.

Government officials act as if the patients' number has decreased. But, the exact statistical data informs the reverse. These actions, conversely, is continuing to worsen the situation .It is with this context, therefore, lobbying and strong advocacy is needed to persuade and thus educate government officials.

Efforts should also be done to seek access to the mass media as an effective communication tool. A television series specifically aimed at limiting the spread of HIV/AIDS must be regularly broadcasted. It will be an excellent venue for instilling the appropriate knowledge and cultivating the youth. The government must allow volunteers to conduct lecture series in bars, nightclubs, hotels and other resort areas.

It is sad to note that so far there is no official statistical data that has been distributed to the public. Hiding such important information may drive the youth to more irresponsible and reckless attitude. The loss is generally to be borne by the country at large. One will allow change if he/she is changed. Otherwise it will be a futile attempt. In this situation the need of skilled advocates and lobbyists becomes apparent.

*B.5. Organizing A Tour Program In Hospitals
And Meet Patients Face To Face*

The first time I shook hands with a person I knew living with HIV/AIDS, I felt electric waves sweeping all over me from head to toe. I sweated and I could not help being blushed. The HIV/AIDS carrier also blushed presumably seeing my face change and sweating. Honestly I could not help it. She stayed briefly with me. She explained how she contracted HIV. It was, she said regrettable, a one day mistake. It has been three years since I met her and is still in good shape. She told that she is taking anti retroviral tables. In due course, however, I have seen more than seven people dying because of HIV/ADIS.

When I tell my friends that I have seen many patients inflicted with HIV/AIDS, they could hardly believe it. They will say but Mr. And or Miss so and so died because of influenza, Tuberculosis, or because of incurable sore or wound, or high fever.

I am of the opinion that a frequent study tour should be organized in hospitals. Doctors should clearly explain to the visiting group how HIV/AIDS patients contracted the diseases, what assistance they are able to take and what preventive measures should the visiting group take. The visiting group should also be allowed to briefly interview the willing patients. They should take first hand information from the patients. It will be good to spend some time with the patients and develop friendship.

"Seeing is believing" as they say. The more people will be allowed to practically meet people dying of the disease the greater is the probability of becoming conscious and thereby limiting the spread of HIV/AIDS.

*B.6 Establishing An Anti HIV/AIDS Association
With Well Defined And Collectively
Accepted Norm*

As there is the association of people living with HIV/AIDS, I am of the opinion that similarly, people who are free of HIV/AIDS must establish an Anti HIV/AIDS Association. If it is to be managed effectively the association will have to establish a collectively accepted norm. I would compare it with the norm one would adopt when one is a member of any religious sect. To be a member of such kind of association will lift up the esteem of the youth for any body will know that the member is free of HIV/AIDS. The acceptance in the society will be open. I believe that individuals will have high self-esteem to be members of such an association. For such kind of Association I would suggest the following points to be adopted as a norm.

- I. Avoid sex before marriage.
- II. Make use of condom when in need of sex
- III. Ensure that one has to have one partner only
- IV. Members should preferably be teetotal and or avoid heavy drinking and intoxication
- V. Be always vigilant for you will never know HIV/AIDS carriers. Remember there is no special mark to identify the carriers
- VI. Contribute article or stories in regard to HIV/ AIDS, and Keep on reading articles on HIV/AIDS
- VII. Each member should attend lecture series on HIV/AIDS
- VIII. As a member of the anti HIV/AIDS association each member will have to be exemplary to the society in general.
- IX. Each member should make periodical laboratory test for HIV/AIDS.

This Anti HIV/AIDS association can have its own constitution and regulation. They can also have an identifying badge. It can be compared to worldwide known associations, such as Rotary or lions club.

Such associations can be formed in many groups throughout the country. They can have as many members as possible. The association can be formed in schools, in work places, in

community environment and in religious associations. The group should initiate fellowship meetings where topics related to HIV/AIDS should frequently be discussed. If the youth are given the responsibility to think for themselves and for the coming posterity, I believe that their contribution in shaping the society will be immense.

B.7 Ensure That Management Of Change Is Maintained With Sustainable Advocacy Programs

I believe that HIV/AIDS is a mysterious persuasive killer. The fact remains that one is attracted by opposite sex partner. One is swayed by the ecstasy in a leisure place where there is dancing and an alcoholic drink will bring about. People are tempted by all the pleasures in this world. One has to be strong not to fall in such trap. Irrespective of the devastating consequences the youth and some elderly people seem to enjoy an unprotected life. It is amidst these pleasures that the deadly virus will surreptitiously strike the lavish pleasure seeker. Those who are prodigal will fall prey to the profane world and the likely hood is that they will be stricken by HIV/AIDS.

To effectively combat the adverse effects that the so-called pleasures will entail, a strong and highly educational program should always be in place to ensure that management of change is maintained. Both the associations of people living with HIV/AIDS and the anti HIV/AIDS associations must exchange their experiences and should create brilliant ideas to limit the spread of HIV/AIDS.

It would be prudent to hang posters and or provide lectures in those entertainment places. The youth have to realize that they can enjoy their leisure time but they have to take absolute precaution not to tread in the unfathomable ditch. Truly said, I believe that education should be able to change. I firmly believe that in a very secretive society change is rather conservative. Therefore to bring forth an effective change; efforts must be done to keep the management of change always active. Great scholars, advocators, thinkers should

work with relentless efforts to shape the understanding and thinking of people where secrecy had dominated the attitude of people for centuries.

The struggle will remain continuous for generations to come.

C. ORGANIZING INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Admittedly to organize international meetings is expensive. Aiming to save the precious life of the individual in particular and the youth in general. Organizing such international symposium will be worth the expense.

The basic goal of organizing international symposium is to allow exchange of experience and ideas within the international community. The symposium will provide update information on the magnitude of the disease, the number of lives that perish everyday and the measures taken to limit the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Such international forums would instill " responsibility on Government officials, the public at large and specially the youth. Efforts exerted to change the attitude of the society will bring forth " responsibility".

D. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

D.1. Monitoring

As an on going project the progress of limiting the spread of HIV/AIDS can be monitored through.

- I. Tracking the number of new HIV/AIDS cases who will be confident to expose themselves
- II. Number of members suggestions forms completed and returned and analysis of members concerns and views of the performance of the associations
- III. Tracking the number of people who conduct regular laboratory test.

IV. Getting statistical data of those people who regularly attend lecture series

D.2 Evaluation

The project will be evaluated by:

- I. Number of new members who have accepted the change and feel no regret when they appear in public forum.
- II. Evaluation of the suggestions given to the forms distributed.
- III. Evaluate the number of laboratory results.
- IV. Evaluate the number of condom users.
- V. Evaluate the level of satisfaction each association proves to its members.
- VI. Control the statistical data whether the graph of new HIV/AIDS cases is dwindling.