

Personal kit to boost HIV testing, treatment

By Chukwuma Muanya

THE unwillingness of Nigerians to go for Voluntary Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) counselling and testing (VCT) has been hinged on the fear of stigmatisation and discrimination if they do test positive and lack of information on how to access care and treatment.

VCT is described as the entry point to life saving Antiretroviral Therapy (ART). But several studies have shown that most Nigerians do not willingly go for HIV test until they start having signs of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

A revolutionary device can now allow Nigerians to use only a drop of their urine to ascertain their HIV status in one minute, a consultant biochemist and Head of the Alliance Biomedical, Atlanta Georgia, United States of America, Mrs. Zizi Imaforbhebe, told *The Guardian* in exclusive interview.

She explained: "We have a breakthrough product, Alliance Biomedical Rapid HIV Urine I & II tests, that uses one drop of urine to tests for HIV. "We are going to get a chance to do product demonstration so that you can see. You can get your results in a minute or less, it is very quick. The beauty about this test is that anybody

young, old, rich rural or not can test himself/herself, his/her sex partners, household workers such as their nannies and maids anytime at anywhere in privacy. So it is a small enough test you can put in your pocket, put in your bag and go with you anywhere. You can go to your bedroom, go to your office, in your hotel room. You can test your status. You can know your status immediately.

"One of the reasons with HIV in developing countries is that there is such a stigma. Now as in most places you can go to a hospital and may be get a free HIV test for example but a lot of people are hesitant to go to the free centres to get themselves tested because they do not want themselves seen going to the free places to get tested because of the stigma.

"So one of the things that this product does is that because it is so simple to use and because people do not have to prick themselves with needless or sharp objects, you do not get their blood drawn in anyway. It is something they can do themselves. So they appreciate that they have something private. And we feel that having a test that is so simple to use that is private and so convenient will actually increase compliance and want more people want to know their HIV status because it is pain free."

Why should one bother about testing for HIV? Imaforbhebe



Imaforbhebe

said: "One should bother about testing for HIV because among certain population the prevalence of HIV is certainly very high, you may know for example that the percentage of new HIV infection is among ages 15 to 24, they have over 60 per cent of all the new HIV infections. People age 15-49 accounts for most of the HIV infections, well over 70 per cent of the HIV infections, and that is our workforce. That is our workforce. You know when we have our active workforce in a developing country having this high amount of HIV infection, you know that is a big thing. You know Nigeria has a young population. About 45 per cent of our population are 49 years and below. That is a big deal why we should know our HIV status."

If you get to know your status, what can you do about it? "One of the beautiful thing about our kit is actually the

detection system. We have collaborated with some agencies and for example you are positive, and you buy the kits you can actually contact some agencies that are focused on HIV," she said.

Imaforbhebe added: "And they can help you either by providing you with counselling. If you are going to need follow up care, they can provide those resources for you. One of the reasons why we encourage people to know their HIV status is because you can have HIV in your system for a while. But the problem is that if it remains untreated it becomes full-blown AIDS. And full-blown AIDS is very tasking to any society. I mean HIV itself here in Nigeria and in many other places account for as high as 35 per cent of the health budget. Can you imagine spending 35 per cent of

your budget just on one disease? Cancer is on the rise right now, as you probably know in many developing countries and also in Nigeria, breast cancer. So many cancers are on the rise now and when you spend one-third of your healthcare budget on one disease, it is a problem. And with HIV you have what is called opportunistic infections. HIV makes you more susceptible to other diseases like tuberculosis (TB) and pneumonia, and those diseases are very contagious.

"You know it is very important for your own peace of mind and to your future to know your HIV status especially if you are sexually active. Even if you are married and your partner is not monogamous with only you for example, you need to know your HIV status. What is happening

now is that the HIV problem is like a cycle. In universities for example, as you probably know, a lot of young girls are going with the older men for money maybe because of their financial situations and they come back to the younger guys.

"So you have the younger girl that goes out with this older man, may be the older man is 40-50 and may be married. So the younger girl infects the married man, the married man infects his wife and maybe she goes to a younger man and the younger man gets infected and then he infects somebody else. So it becomes a deadly cycle. This new kit is very empowering because it gives you the responsibility to know your own status. I mean it is not worth risking your future if you do not know your status."

Lagos Island Maternity proposes model to reduce maternal deaths

By Gbenga Akinsanya

LAGOS Island Maternity Hospital, Lagos Island has proposed a community based health insurance for women of childbearing age.

The hospital said that it needed more funds to upgrade its state-of-the-art obstetric and gynaecological facilities clinic to enable it effectively contribute to the reduction of the maternal mortality and morbidity in the country.

Chairman of the Governing Board Lagos Island Maternity Hospital, Dr. Abiola Idayat Balogun, spoke recently as part of the activities marking its 50th anniversary at a media briefing in Lagos said: "Maternal mortality remains high in Africa. This is something that this hospital is particularly concerned about. 100 women die for every 100,000 live births. Due to our population, although we do not have the worst mortality

ratio, more women die in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world.

"One in nine women who die in pregnancy or childbirth worldwide is a Nigerian. We hope to continue to work to reduce this... This is an opportunity to raise funds for the development of the hospital as well as to educate the general public on the importance of antenatal care and safe delivery, the reduction of maternal mortality rate in Nigeria, gynaecological services in Africa and family planning."

Balogun said that the goal of the new Lagos Island Maternity Hospital would be an internationally recognised centre of excellence. "We hope to continue to support the postgraduate training in the hospital. In a few years, the first set of our specialist doctors will graduate. This will increase the number of specialists in Lagos State in partic-

ular and in Nigeria in general. I am sure this will contribute immensely to the reduction of the maternal mortality and morbidity," she said.

Balogun said that nowhere in the world could a government wholly bear the burden of the health of its nation in toto.

"The cost of first class health care is huge. No government can take it upon itself ad infinitum. We will require all well meaning members of the society, the business sector, banks, philanthropists, multinational organisations, all social clubs in Lagos to come forward and contribute as much as they can," she said.

She added: "This is the dawn of a new era. We must begin to look at other ways of doing things. We implore donors to also show interest in the project, ask questions of us, breathe behind our necks and ask of us uncomfortable questions if need be."

NAFDAC lab to get WHO's approval

By Paul Adunwole

AS part of efforts to curb fake and unwholesome drugs and food products, the new National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) laboratory at Yaba is set to get pre-qualification by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Director-General of the NAFDAC, Dr. Paul Orhii, during a tour of its new state-of-the-art laboratory located at Yaba, Lagos by the House of Representatives Committee on Health recently said that the agency had fully equipped the laboratories to get WHO approval.

Orhii said: "The agency is working hard to eliminate manufacturing of fake drugs in the country especially in Lagos. The agency has two laboratories in other to carry out their duty effectively.

"Fake products are coming in to this country especially in Lagos that is why I am in Lagos, we have equipment which we are using to carry out our duty effectively. We are organising workshops for people for them to stop buying fake drugs and unregulated food products. We did it in Lagos and also in Kano. We have equipment especially now we are planning to get approval from WHO.

"We are going to showcase the facilities we have here in Lagos. In fact the Southwest zone is the biggest, controlling 80 per cent of our activities. Most of the manufacturing companies are here in Lagos in Ota and also in other areas surrounding Lagos here, so most of our activities are here in Lagos."

Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Health Dr. Alaba Lad Ojomo said that the house had decided to carry out its function by assisting NAFDAC to fight use of fake drugs by the citizen of the country.

Ojomo added that the house would also assist NAFDAC to provide a conducive atmosphere for the workers and other related issues that is affecting the sector.

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