

Address stigma, discrimination as top priority to end AIDS

UGANDA has made remarkable progress in reducing HIV infections over the past decade, cutting new cases by nearly half. However, despite this progress, stigma remains a significant barrier to adherence to treatment, particularly for children and adolescents living with HIV.

These young individuals often suffer in silence, facing isolation and discrimination in their schools and communities.

This is made worse because many schools lack child-friendly counselling systems, making it difficult for HIV-positive students to access the support they need.

Often times, once a child's status is revealed, they are isolated, further exacerbating the problem. Some children even stop taking their medication to avoid being discovered, putting their health and lives at risk.

The reasons for this stigma are complex, but one thing is clear: there is a pressing need for trust and sensitivity. Carers, teachers and communities must work together to create a supportive environment where children living with HIV feel safe and empowered to manage their condition.



EDITORIAL

Editorial Tel: 0414 337000/337139/337125;

Fax: 0414 235843; P. O. BOX 9815 Kampala.

Email: news@newvision.co.ug;

Marketing/Advertising Tel: 0414337000

Fax: 0414 232050

Email: advertising@newvision.co.ug

Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC);

Company listed on the Uganda Securities

Exchange

www.newvision.co.ug

One often-overlooked aspect of HIV management is the importance of regular meals. Irregular meal times can disrupt treatment, making it challenging for children to adhere to their medication regimens. This highlights the need for a holistic approach to HIV care, one that

addresses not only the medical aspects, but also the social and emotional challenges faced by those living with the virus.

The Government of Uganda took a crucial step forward with the 2020 national policy guideline on ending stigma and discrimination. This policy compels all stakeholders to prevent HIV-related stigma and discrimination in schools, health facilities, workplaces, and communities. It is now time for action.

Carers, schools and communities must work closely together to lighten the burden of stigma on HIV-positive learners. This can be achieved by creating safe spaces for disclosure, providing child-friendly counselling services, and promoting awareness and understanding of HIV. We need to ensure that all students, regardless of their status, feel valued and supported.

As Uganda strives to end AIDS by 2030, addressing stigma and discrimination must be a top priority to create a society where children and adolescents living with HIV can thrive, free from fear, isolation and discrimination.