Why Kenya won’t get zero Aids deaths

Kenya may fail to achieve zero Aids deaths if it fails to integrate HIV/ TB programmes

By KIUNDI WAWEBU

Ms Lucy Chepne, who has HIV for 18 years, is scared that even as Kenya is winning the war on HIV, it has ignored the connection between HIV and TB.

In 2000, Lucy was diagnosed with a TB/HIV co-infection. She developed complications from both treatments that saw her hospitalised for seven months.

But Lucy was lucky as she underwent both ART and TB treatment under the same roof at the only TB-integrated clinic in Kenya at the Moi Referral Hospital, Eldoret.

But there has been little TB/HIV integration, even though TB remains the leading killer of people living with HIV.

This sees patients with TB and HIV spend time at a HIV clinic, only to start the process all over again at a TB clinic.

Drugs for both diseases have intense side effects, with defaulting resulting in dire consequences. Defaulting in TB treatment results in multiple drug resistant TB, which is highly infectious, expensive to treat and takes longer to cure.

"It should be a one-stop shop," said Lucy Chepne, the director of TB Action Group, which she founded in 2000.

TB PROGRAMMES

People living with TB/HIV programmes feel that the HIV arm has been given more mileage at their expense.

According to WHO, HIV increases the risk of developing active TB in people living with HIV, having between 30-37 times higher risk of contracting the disease.

In 2004, the World Health Organization came up with an intergovernmental policy on collaborative TB/HIV activities, which stipulate that there should be an establishment of National TB Programme and National Aids Control Programme collaborative mechanisms.

Integrating HIV and Aids, with TB, would be one of the ways of meeting this year’s theme: "Getting to Zero: Zero Aids related deaths; Zero HIV infections and zero discrimination.

At a workshop held the week at the Sarova Pangani Hotel, regional players from the TB and HIV programmes discussed how the respective governments are handling the intervention.

Among them was Reuben Grach, Medical Officer for HIV/TB Department at the World Health Organisation, Geneva. Grach reports that for countries like Kenya to get to zero they need to implement the WHO Three Is for HIV/TB.

"The Three Is are Intensified TB Case Finding. Isolatized Preventive Therapy and Infection Control," he said.

The objective of the conference was enhancing the ownership and implementation of TB/HIV Integration. It was organized by the Kenya Legal and Ethical Issues Network on HIV/AIDS, Aids and Rights Alliance for Eastern Africa and WHO.

Infection Control is geared towards reducing the likelihood of exposure to TB in health facilities and in the community while Intensified case finding is aimed to ensure early identification.

Isolatized Preventive Therapy (IPT), will reduce the risk of TB to people who have inactive TB. At the conference, it emerged that Kenya has opted out of the IPT therapy.

On this, Grach notes, "Adopting the guidelines is ultimately a country’s decision. But implementing the same is critical as it has unparalleled success in treating HIV and TB.

QuickRead

NAROB: Youth urged to behave responsibly

French Ambassador to Kenya has asked Kenyan youths to be actively involved in the fight against AIDS. The envoy said HIV was still a major threat despite the strides that have been made in fighting it. He urged the youth to behave responsibly no new HIV infections and Aids-related deaths were to be realized. "The youth must make a commitment to stop the spread of the disease," he said.

MOMBASA: Man and son circumcised together

A man and his 12-year-old son were circumcised together at the World AIDS Day was marked yesterday. Mr David Simiyu, 43, and son underwent the cut at Kimon Hospital in Changamwe. Mr Simiyu said he was happy with the down town brand but noted that the five per cent was still too high and a lot needed to be done to reduce the figure. Speaking at Makupa during the launch of a community policing team, Mr Simiyu asked the youth to avoid practices that may expose them to risks of contracting the disease, especially during this festive season.

The prevalence rate of HIV and Aids in Western Province has dropped from seven per cent to five per cent. Western PSC Daniel Ostol said that the decline meant more people living with HIV were getting treatment.