



*Nine Years as discordant couples, Mr. and Mrs. Uche are living happily.*



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## The Sunny Uche Story

**T**he Uche's have been married for 13 years and have four children. Nine years ago, in 2003, they were discovered to be a discordant couple (where one spouse is HIV- while the other is HIV+). Mrs. Uche recalls: "When I was six months pregnant with my first child, I was offered an HIV test. I did not hesitate to take the test, the result came out positive".

Of her reaction to this news, Mrs. Uche says: "My heart was just banging and banging against my chest". Because the news was so sudden (as there was practically no pre-test, post-test or partner disclosure HIV counseling in those days), Mrs. Uche there and then resolved not to disclose her HIV status to her husband. Three months on, and in the delivery room, Mrs. Uche's doctor disclosed Mrs. Uche's HIV status to Mr. Uche. This was without Mrs. Uche's consent as was the malpractice then. On his reaction to the news, Mr. Uche says: "I was very furious that she had kept it a secret from me, but I kept my emotions in check considering that she had just gone through surgery

(birth by caesarean section) to prevent transmission of the virus to the baby".

The couple could not discuss the issue of Mrs. Uche's HIV + status for several months. The topic was off limits. Mr. Uche later went for an HIV test and was found HIV negative and he has remained HIV negative for the past nine years.

The Uche's are beneficiaries of the Positive Health Dignity Prevention (PHDP) program of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in St. Mary's Catholic Hospital Gwagwalada, Abuja. Through the PHDP program (formerly referred to as prevention with positives program) PEPFAR offers discordant couples like the Uches treatment and adherence counseling at health and care facilities across Nigeria to lower the viral load of the infected individual. This makes them less infectious thus reducing their ability to transmit the virus to family members and the general population.

There are factors that facilitate transmission of HIV. Such factors may include presence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), amounts of virus in the body (viral load) and not using condoms. The PHDP program also offers positive prevention messages to increase sexual risk reduction and increase health seeking behaviors. This helps to encourage safer sex practices, prevent STI which can complicate their health, provide treatment and encourage drug adherence to lessen viral load which in turn lessens the risk of HIV transmission.

On how they have managed their HIV discordant relationship, Mrs. Uche has this to say: "I have received so much PHDP information and enlightenment on how an HIV+ person can prevent HIV transmission to the sexual partner or unborn child. All my four children (two boys and two girls) were born HIV free". Mr. Uche added that he was able to manage his interpersonal relationship with his wife because he surmised that life is full of challenges and he saw his wife's HIV+ status as his own personal challenge that he must tackle rather than look for an alternative partner. ❖ *Story by Olayinka Balogun*



## You Need to Know

### Prevention Through Care and Treatment

The 2010 National HIV Sero-prevalence Sentinel Survey puts the national HIV prevalence median at 4.1%. However, it is instructive that about 40% of new infections occur among persons perceived as practicing “low risk sex” including married partners. This is not surprising as one of the drivers of the epidemic is low risk perception among this group.

Major advances in the area of HIV prevention through care and treatment the past 30 years of HIV have included the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis to reduce HIV acquisition among HIV-negative individuals and early and prolonged use of drug regimens for identified HIV+ pregnant women in pregnancy and during the period of breastfeeding until cessation to prevent mother to child transmission.

A major new finding announced by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2011 shows that when HIV infected persons start treatment early they are 96 percent less likely to infect their partners. This shows that mankind now has the tool to finally reverse the tide of the virus. However, it would take the concerted efforts of all to optimize the benefits of care and treatment as a prevention tool.

HIV+ persons would need to ensure 100% adherence to their medication. This involves keeping clinical and drug refill appointments and taking the medications at the right dose, at the right time and at the right frequency. This would help to control the virus in their own bodies and prevent transmission to their sexual partner.

Government should support scale up of HIV treatment services to the general population as the high treatment unmet need has created a pool of infected persons with potential of transmitting HIV infection.

Healthcare providers and other care givers should intensify the implementation of Provider Initiated Testing and Counseling (PITC) and promote partner disclosure and testing. PITC strategy entails health care service provider initiating HIV testing and counseling at every contact with patients irrespective of their clinical presentation.

Communities hold a major stake in addressing gender disparities that fuel non-disclosure of HIV+. ❖



Story contributed by (L-r), Dolapo, Green and Emeka.

### LeaderSpeak

(Quotes on PEPFAR)



“With the help of PEPFAR, we have enhanced our clinical management capabilities and supplied state of the art clinical/laboratory equipment and made functional over 500 clinical labs at tertiary, secondary and primary health care facilities.” – Prof. A. Nasidi, OON, Director, Nigeria National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Abuja delivering a World AIDS Day 2011 message from the Hon. Minister of Health.

### News & Titbits

The second series of Shuga: Love, Sex, Money, the critically acclaimed TV series brought to you by MTV Base, the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) et al is now set to premier. Set in Kenya, the fast-paced drama follows the lives, loves and ambitions of a group of young people and their dangerous living which puts their fabulous futures at risk. Nigerian viewers will get the chance to see Banky W and Wiz Kid both play themselves in the series, performing during emotionally hard-hitting club scenes shot in Nairobi. They will see Nigerian born actors living in Kenya and their Kenyan counterparts in action from 14 February 2012 when Shuga premieres on MTV channels around the world.

### History: An HIV Time Line

(2011) The U.S. National Institutes of Health announced on 12 May 2011 that after a six-year, nine-country clinical trial that cost \$73 million, it was discovered that anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) can reduce the likelihood of transmission of HIV to an uninfected partner by a remarkable 96%. Meaning that humanity finally has the tools to reverse the HIV epidemic.

PEPFAR News edited by Olayinka Balogun