



Top: A fully recovered Folake attending to her phone call center business.

Below: Community health workers counselling Folake during her illness.

commenced.

NIMR is one of the more than 290 treatment centers supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in Nigeria. As of 31st March 2012, more than 444,600 men, women, and children are currently receiving treatment in the country under the PEPFAR program.

As Folake gradually improved, she was able to regain her strength. As her treatment progressed, she was visiting the NIMR clinic once a week for follow-up. But that was two years ago. Today, Folake is doing so well and only requires a once in a month visit to the AIDS clinic to collect her drugs and for the routine medical check-up.

According to Mr. Rex Ajenifuja, Director of Hope for HIV/AIDS International, his organization has been working to support Ilaje community since 2004. Hope for HIV International is a grant recipient under the 2011 U.S. Ambassador's PEPFAR Small Grant Program for Children Orphaned by AIDS and other Vulnerable Children. "The grant from PEPFAR helped us to provide financial support to people like Folake, so that while they are getting free treatment under the country-wide PEPFAR program, they can also start a business to support themselves and their children in their other areas of need," says Ajenifuja.

Through the support of PEPFAR, Hope for HIV/AIDS International trained 30 young women in Ilaje community to become home-based caregivers to persons affected by HIV/AIDS, including children made vulnerable due to the loss or incapacitation of their parents or guardians. "Through PEPFAR support, we have constructed a 5-classroom structure, including a Daycare and Nursery that serves 250 orphans and vulnerable children in the community and this is helping to provide for the educational needs of children in affected families", Ajenifuja reminisced.

Folake's story, an AIDS survivor story, is a pointer to the fact that HIV infection is not a death sentence, and infected persons and their dependents can live normal lives and have hope for the future. With readily available antiretroviral medications and treatment, Folake should live for decades.

Folake is now a healthy, happy, and vibrant woman. With the support of PEPFAR, the mother of three runs her own phone call center business in

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Back from the Brink: Folake's Survivor Story

It was sometime in 2010. Folake was passing stools uncontrollably, vomiting, and drastically losing weight. Her family tried a lot of things to get her relief, including "treatment" from quack nurses as well as herbal treatment. Folake was practically gone when her family was introduced to "people who make house calls to very sick people".

Fortunately, Folake's encounter with the "people who make house calls to very sick people" (or community-based caregivers), though late, was, not too late. The community caregivers recognized Folake's symptoms. They see a lot of such symptoms in their slum community in Ilaje, Lagos, where HIV infection is widespread. As expected, they readily suspected HIV infection or, worse still, full blown AIDS, and promptly referred Folake to a nearby HIV treatment centre - the Nigeria Institute of Medical Research (NIMR), Yaba, Lagos. By the end of the following day, on which Folake was taken to NIMR, her infection with HIV had been properly diagnosed and her treatment



You Need to Know

International Day of the Girl Child

International Day of the Girl Child (October 11) is a newly established UN observance that will be commemorated for the first time this year, 2012. The observance seeks to promote girls' rights and highlight gender inequalities that remain between boys and girls.

The theme for this first-ever observance of the Day is "Ending Child Marriage." The theme was chosen because child marriage violates the rights of millions of girls around the world, impacting on all aspects of their lives. It disrupts their education, puts their health at risk, and denies them their childhood.

The girl-child in Nigeria today is faced with a lot of gender-based issues. Some of these include harmful traditional/cultural practices (such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation), child sexual abuse and slavery, trafficking in persons, sexual coercion and abuse, neglect, and domestic violence. (Moreno 2005).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is rooted mainly in structural inequalities between men and women. Violence or the fear of violence can pose formidable barriers to HIV prevention, care, and treatment, limiting individuals' ability to learn their status and adopt and maintain protective measures ranging from negotiating safer sex to getting and staying on treatment to remaining in school (Gardsbane 2010; World Health Organization [WHO])

Research studies from India, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam demonstrate that women who are HIV-positive are more at risk of violence than women who are HIV-negative, and that violence is a major contributing factor to HIV infection (Program on International Health and Human Rights and Harvard School of Public Health 2009. ❖



Story contributed by U.S. Mission Staff, Anthonia Aina.

LeaderSpeak

(Quotes on PEPFAR)



“We [Nigeria] still have a huge [HIV] burden, but with U.S. support we will speed up the progress” – Professor Viola Onwuliri, Nigeria's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs during the visit of Ambassador Eric Goosby, U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator in April 2012.

News & Titbits

The United Nations General Assembly, by Resolution 66/170 of December 19, 2011, declared October 11 International Day of the Girl Child, to recognize girls' rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world.

The establishing of the International Day of the Girl Child followed a multi-year campaign by activists in Canada and the United States. U.S. Secretary of State, Mrs. Hilary Clinton will host an event to commemorate the Day highlighting its importance.

History: An HIV Time Line

July/August 2011:

During July and August 2012, Armenia and Fiji lifted travel restrictions for people living with HIV. However, 47 countries, territories and areas continue to maintain a variety of restrictions on the travel and/or stay for people living with HIV.

August 2011:

U.S. Federal Drug Administration approval of Complera, the second all-in-one fixed dose combination tablet, increases treatment options offered to people living with HIV. Thus, patients can take one tablet instead of many tablets per day, and this tablet can be taken at any time of the day and not at the fixed times required for other HIV drugs. This increases the patient's ability to adhere to the strict treatment regime required for HIV.

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