

HIV/AIDS: MIXED

HIV/AIDS remains a highly controversial issue in South Africa, with the government and civil society at loggerheads on how best to treat and manage the disease. While there's still no cure, a host of remedies have emerged, both traditional and scientific. With government and rights groups squaring off in favour of different courses of action, the lack of a unified voice on treatment has left those living with the virus vulnerable to exploitation and many end up paying with their lives. Zanele Buthelezi compiled this report....

IN:

OUT:

DUR:

TEXT:

[fx fx TAC advocating for arvs fx fx]

[fx fx Manto Tshabalala-Msimang saying people have a right to choosefx fx]

These have been the different messages conveyed in the public domain over the years. But after recent meetings between government and civil organizations a commitment of unity was finally struck on HIV and AIDS.

But as the dust settles where has this bickering left people living with HIV/AIDS? Confused about the correct choice of treatment and vulnerable to exploitation. Others are left to count casualties....

[fx fx ups [ngahamba kakhulu ngizama ukusiza umfowethu kodwa ngangaluthola usizo]....Victoria Gumede talking fx fx]

translation [I went everywhere looking for help for my brother but could not get any]

For Victoria Gumede of Nkolokotho, in KwaHlabisa in northern KwaZulu-Natal, time has not healed her wounds. HIV/AIDS has claimed the lives of three of her siblings. She was sent from pillar to

post by people claiming there were traditional healers who could cure the disease but to no avail.....

upsound [sahamba kakhulu saze saya nakoThekwini sifuna usizo]

translation: [once we even went as far as Durban where there said there was someone who could help but we were not assisted]

Victoria Gumede is also HIV positive. She was diagnosed with the virus eleven years ago. When she had to start treatment in 2005 she chose antiretrovirals. She however sometimes gets hesitant about the choice of treatment she's made when she hears new claims of cures for the disease.....

[kufika umuntu akutshela kukhona osizayo musuyacabanga ukuthi wenza iphutha yini ngokuthi uthathe la maphili ebekhona umuntu osizayo]

translation: [one person comes and tells you they have a treatment I then start to think that I have made a wrong choice to go on to ARVs when I can get help....]

Victoria Gumede's confusion is just one of many similar stories. Hlengiwe Gumede is the founder of Zehluju HIV/Aids Support Group, which helps people like Victoria.

With only an income generated through sewing, Zehluju manages to assist orphans, provide home based care and support those on ARV treatment. The group uses one of the local's store room as an office, with the absence of the common office furniture and stationary marking the dire state of working conditions.

Hlengiwe says they have come across a number of people who are being discouraged against ARVs by family members who fear they might die from side effects ...

[abanye emndemini babatshela ukuthi amaarvs ayingozi kudwa siyabakhuthaza]

translation: [the families tell them that ARVs are dangerous but we try to talk to them and encourage them...]

With the little they have Zehluju volunteers are slowly overcoming issues such as stigma in the rural and largely conservative community, educating about HIV/AIDS.

Doctors say this confusion impacts negatively on adherence to antiretrovirals for patients who have started the treatment.

Antiretroviral treatment clinic manager at GJ Crooks Hospital in KwaZulu-Natal, Doctor Karen Volke, says the demand for ARVs decreases once patients hear about an alternative treatment being publicised or when something negative is said about the drugs...

ups [people have voluntarily stopped ARVs treatments to try ubhejane and other herbal medicines. Recently I've had three people coming back in quite a serious medical condition. They have deteriorated a lot. But they are willing to go onto ARV treatment again. And we will be giving them that chance again.]

Hlengiwe says it helps to have support groups within communities, especially rural areas, with people they can identify with....

[Lezi zinhlangano izona ezingakwazi ukwenza abantu bazi ukuthi yini esebenzayo ngoba abantu bagcina bedidekile ngoba abekho abantu ababakhuthazayo emphakathini ukuthi iyiphi indle abangaphila ngayo.]

Translation: [These organizations can assist people by informing them about HIV/AIDS and what to do. People end up being confused when there's no one encouraging them on which lifestyle to follow when affected by the disease.]

About 326 000 people died of Aids related illnesses last year. A new reviewed Strategic Plan to manage HIV/AIDS in the country is expected to be unveiled on World Aids Day. It remains to be seen though whether the new commitments will promote less mixed messages on the pandemic. SOQ.