

Treatment Literacy

Treatment Literacy is having a full understanding of the major issues related to an illness or a disease. *Treatment Literacy* means understanding the science, treatment, side effects and management guidelines of an illness or a disease. In the case of HIV/AIDS, *Treatment Literacy* means providing people living with HIV/AIDS with adequate and appropriate skills and knowledge necessary to manage HIV infection through antiretrovirals' or ARVs.

Treatment preparedness

Before starting on antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) it is important for a person living with HIV/AIDS to have adequate information about HIV/AIDS and treatment. This helps the person living with HIV/AIDS to change any behaviour that may hamper adherence to treatment such as alcohol consumption and unprotected sex.

Getting ready to start ARVs



These are some of the steps to be taken if you test HIV positive. Firstly, ask your counselor or health care professional - whoever is doing your test - to refer you to the clinic to do the following tests:

- Full blood count
- CD4 count - CD4 cells are part of the immune system. CD4 count is the number of CD4 cells per drop of blood. The CD4 count determines your eligibility for enrolment to take ARVs. If your CD4 count is 250 or below you must start taking ARVs.
- Viral load – to determine the amount of HI virus in the body.
- TB - If you are found to have Tuberculosis (TB) you should be enrolled on TB treatment. If you do not have TB you should start TB prophylaxis (Isoniazid or INH) and Pneumonia prophylaxis (cotrimoxazole).

Positive Living

If your CD4 count is above 250 you are not eligible to start ARV treatment, your immune system is still strong enough to fight diseases and you can still stay healthy and free from opportunistic infections if you take good

care of your health.



Staying healthy

- Clean your body thoroughly and regularly to avoid germs such as bacteria and fungi.
- Eat a well balanced meal. Mealie pap (carbohydrates), vegetables and meat (protein).
- Exercise regularly to keep physically fit
- Avoid stress – being HIV positive does not mean you should stop leading your regular life or to stop enjoying life the way you always have.
- Go to the clinic if you are feeling ill, do not wait until you are very sick.
- If you are given medication for any ailment make sure you take it according to the health care professionals' advice or instructions.
- Practice safer sex. Use a condom each time you have sex to avoid re-infection. Re-infection means getting a different strain of HIV which may be different from the one you already have in your body.
- Get updated on HIV related issues and treatments.



How do ARVs work?

Antiretrovirals' suppress the amount of HIV in our bodies by stopping the HIV from multiplying. The immune system then becomes stronger to fight infections.

- You are eligible for ARVs if you have a CD4 count below 250;
- You are eligible for ARVs if you have opportunistic infections e.g. TB;
- If you are taking your ARVs the correct way (adherence), your CD4 should start going up again;
- Monitor and keep record of your CD4 count to know if your CD4 is improving or not.

The table like the one below will help keep record of your CD4 count:

Date specimen (CD4) was taken	Results
18 June 2007	189 cells/ml
19 September 2007	300 cells/ml
21 December 2007	502 cells/ml



Adherence

Adherence means sticking to or being loyal to something. In this case, adherence means taking ARVs at the right time and the right amount as prescribed by a health care professional. In this regard, you must always tell your doctor about your daily schedule so as to choose the most suitable time to take your drugs.

Understand the medication (pills) you are taking - It is very important to understand the pills you are taking; to know when you are meant to take them and how many pills are you supposed to take. Whether to take your pills with food or not, and importantly how to store your pills, it is important to keep them in a safe place where no one will tamper with them. Before you leave the doctors office make sure he explains the kinds of side effects you may experience. If you do experience side effects don't stop taking your pills or skipping them if before you talk to your doctor.

Plan ahead - It is important that you tell your family members or whomever you are living with and have disclosed to about your pill schedule so that they can help you remember to take them. Make sure you plan ahead of time so that you do not run out of pills. Use a pill box (some pillboxes can hold enough for a week) and count your pills ahead of time to make sure you have the right amount at all times. Find a 'regular daily activity' to help you remember to take your pills. Maybe you prefer to take your pills as soon as you get out of bed or, while you are watching *The Bold and The Beautiful*, or when you come home from the gym.

Adherence also involves:

- Taking medication for other illnesses such as TB, as instructed by health care professionals;
- Eating and drinking the right foods with your medication;
- Knowing about interactions between ARVs and other types of medication;
- Learn more about short term and long term side effects;
- Some side effects are manageable but some are fatal;
- Report any side effects to your doctor as soon as you start feeling unwell.



Disclosure

Disclosure means giving out information about your HIV status to someone else. *Note that it should be out of your own free will.* Before you tell someone about your HIV status be sure to know why you want to tell them. What do you want from them? Be prepared for any reaction they may have to the news. Consider the best and the worst reaction you may have to deal with. They may be scared, mainly out of ignorance so prepare yourself and inform yourself fully about HIV so you can give them information to dispel these fears. Lastly, get support – discuss this issue over with someone you trust. You don't have to tell everybody. Take your time to decide who to tell and how you will approach them. Be sure you are ready. Remember, once you tell someone, they won't forget you are HIV positive.

Telling others can be good because:

- You can get love and support to help manage your health effectively;
- You can keep your close friends and loved ones informed about issues that are important to you;
- You don't have to hide your HIV status;
- You can get the most appropriate health care;
- You can reduce the chances of transmitting the disease to others

Telling others may be difficult because:

- Others may find it hard to accept your health status;
- Some people might discriminate against you or treat you unfairly because you are HIV positive;
- You may be rejected in social or dating situations.

Support groups

- Find out about a support group in your area. The local clinic can help you with such information.
- Meet other people who are HIV positive. Talk to them about your fears and challenges. Sharing experiences can alleviate some of your fears. Peer counseling can also help you.

Important Contacts

1. Chirwah Thulaganyo Mahloko
Boteti Sub-district +267 71498215
2. Senkamile Molapisi
Maun Counseling Centre +267 6800625
3. Kennedy Mupeli
CEYOHO +267 72796747
4. Israel Tjiharuka
Ntsapedi Support Group
Sehithwa +267 74258724
5. Francistown Network of
Support Groups +267 2412241
6. Tebogo Monametsi
BOCAIP +267 3916454
7. Mompoloki Good Oakantse
Tebelopele +267 71882543
8. Thata Keadire
Tebelopele +267 72234097
9. Arnold Sokwa
BONELA +267 3932516
10. Cindy Kelemi
BONELA +267 3932516

BONELA

The Botswana Network on Ethics, Law and HIV/AIDS

Postal address: P.O. Box 402958, Gaborone, Botswana

Tel: +267 393 2516 Fax: +267 393 2517

www.bonela.org



BeTreatmentLiterate

Promote Healthy Living
Prevent the Spread of HIV/AIDS