

HIV/AIDS – THE EPNL EXPERIENCE

The scope of the HIV/AIDS scourge in EPNL is small, but Management recognized very early in the day, that if ignored, it will escalate into a major health disaster that will affect every facet of its activities. So, the EPNL management has been in the forefront of the vanguard to both stop the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact in the lives of those afflicted.

Thus, management drew up an HIV/AIDS policy, authorized an HIV/AIDS workplace program and undertakes full antiretroviral treatment of all victims – staff and dependants. Management has even financed a six-week treatment of ophthalmic complications of the disease abroad.

Furthermore, management approved capacity building program against the disease by sponsoring staff to workshops, seminars, etc, within the country and abroad. Management also authorized the pasting of anti - HIV/AIDS posters conspicuously within the company premises. EPNL is a grade 'A' member of NIBUCAA, and not only financially up to date, but donated generously to equip the Secretariat.

With the support of the management, the Medical Department in conjunction with specialists, has undertaken enlightenment campaigns against HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003. During this period, the Medical Department also embarked on Hepatitis B immunization and free condom distribution on demand in the Clinic. These services are very well patronized.

Then **came** the Healthy Living Awareness Campaign 2004, a much bolder program, with sub-themes on **HIV/AIDS, SMOKING, ALCOHOLISM, and OBESITY**. It held in all company locations, and was a huge success. It will hold again this year on an even bigger scale to include dependants and Host Communities.

The Managing Director gave impetus to the program by delivering an enthusiastic speech to kick-start the program in Port Harcourt, and personally sat through the four-hour presentations in Lagos. At the last **World AIDS Day**, the Managing Director ordered a “**one-minute stop-work for HIV/AIDS victims**” which was observed in all locations of the company.

Thus, staff of EPNL is no longer in doubt about the gravity of the disease, and the premium management places on their continuing good health. All these have acted in tandem to turn the tide against HIV spread, and stigmatization of its victims; thus accounting for the small number of six patients on antiretroviral therapy in the company.

PUBLIC ENLIGHTENMENT ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE COMPANY

In keeping with the company's policy that the Human Resource is its highest asset, EPNL Management has encouraged and supported these enlightenment activities.

- ❖ Health Tips in “This Week”, the company's internal weekly publication;
- ❖ Anti- HIV/AIDS posters adorn the Notice boards in all company locations;
- ❖ HIV/AIDS and HEPATITIS B campaigns have been holding annually in all company locations since 2001 for staff, contract staff, and spouses. It elicited lots of interest in our ongoing Hepatitis B immunization program and condom distribution;
- ❖ Healthy Living awareness Campaign 2004 had as sub-themes: HIV/AIDS, SMOKING, ALCOHOLISM, and OBESITY. It held in all locations. This program was a huge success. It will hold this year on a larger scale to include staff dependants and host communities.



COMPANY HIV/AIDS WORKPLACE PROGRAMME

Encapsulated in Company Management System Corporate Document, "Medical Department Manual".
Main activities are:

- (i) Ensure strict confidentiality, non-discrimination, non-victimization and non-stigmatization;
- (ii) Voluntary Counseling and Testing strictly on consent at Routine Consultation, Pre-employment and Annual Medical Check-up, Antenatal booking and visits;
- (iii) **Confirmatory, Baseline and Follow-up CD4 Count and Viral Load** testing formerly at Nigerian Institute of Medical Research, Yaba, LAGOS; now at **Cerba-Pasteur Institute, Paris, FRANCE.**
- (iv) Antiretroviral treatment when indicated, in conformity with the National tritherapy of Stavudine, Lamivudine and Nevirapine.
- (v) Patients, their 6-monthly CD4/Viral load, weight, intercurrent or pre-existing illnesses, opportunistic infections, etc, are captured on spreadsheet secured with codes and password to monitor response.
- (vi) Support treatment, counseling for positive outlook and lifestyle changes, good nutrition and hygiene advice are regularly given.
- (vii) Disease mitigation activities like continuous public enlightenment programs, safe disposal of medical sharps and hospital wastes, counseling for universal precaution by all medical staff, and free availability of condoms.