

## **HIV/AIDS Counselling**

The discovery of being HIV+ itself is a worry to people, thinking of course of life after infection, thinking of the illness blitz they are to experience until the end of their life. But this possibly happens because people have not realized that it is possible to live positively and end life with little pain because of support and counselling as well as open-mindedness. Thus, once one has discovered to have been infected of HIV, there is a growth of anxieties which include the following, according to (Willis: 2002):

### **Shock**

- On hearing the diagnosis and considering its implications
- Through disappointment on not hearing good news

### **Anxiety/Fear**, due to:

- Not knowing what course the infection will take
- Worrying about the effects of the treatment/medication
- Rejection by family/friends/community
- Isolation through sexual rejection because of the fears of others concerning infection
- Anticipating the partner/family's inability to cope with the situation
- Concerns about job and/or skill losses
- The possibility of physical deterioration and/or disability over time

### **Despair**, because of:

- Little hope of a cure
- Persistent worries about one's inevitable physical decline
- Recriminations about being infected and/or spreading the infection
- The limiting effects of the virus
- The effect on one's family of being infected
- The stigma of being HIV-infected

## **Areas of Counselling**

There are two main areas of HIV counselling. Quoting (Willis 2002), the infected persons can be counseled by:

- "Educating them so that they will understand the nature of their problem; explaining the available treatment options; outlining ways to prevent others from being infected by them."
- "Supporting them through anxieties and other physical needs met by people in the course of their illness."

Apart from the outlined areas above, counselling opportunities might be provided at different stages and be provided by different people. This is a point worth noting. However, appropriate counselling interventions include:

- Initial attendance at a clinic or medical centre where the at-risk person will have the HIV testing procedures explained
- The communication of the test results
- Personal counselling of the HIV-positive person, and the partner/family where this is possible and applicable
- Available treatment regimes
- Instruction in safer sexual practices
- Explanation of the development and effects of opportunistic infections and their delay/treatment
- Issues surrounding loss/bereavement/grief
- Counselling the family of the bereaved

## **HIV/AIDS Support Networks**

The issue of supporting the sick from HIV is an inclusive area. It requires great collective efforts of the faith community, civil society groups, the government and even individual involvement as well as the inclusion of the local political structures. The infected gather hope when they can experience the network of support of the following:

- Families, friends, work colleagues
- Medical and paramedical staff
- Social services/ charitable organizations
- Professional counselors/psychologists
- Faith communities
- Special organizations working specifically with HIV/AIDS-infected people and their families.

It also has to be remembered that counselling materials and messages should be relative to the specific target group such as families, women, sex workers, or youth. The support given to the concerned should be accessible, caring, confidential, consistent and genuine.

## **The ABC of HIV Prevention**

The following is a summary of the HIV prevention:

- A – Abstain
- B – Be faithful
- C – Condom if necessary