

Q Dear Doctor, I am troubled by news that HIV prevalence and new infections are still high in cities and some districts, especially among young women and adolescent girls. What is the one thing we can do to end the scourge because at this rate we shall never end AIDS being a threat to public health by 2030?

Elvis

What can be done to end the HIV scourge?

DOCTOR WATITI

TOWARDS ZERO

Unfortunately, when it comes to ending AIDS being a threat to public health there is no silver bullet or magical solution to the complicated problem that HIV and AIDS are. This is because what works for one person or group of people may not work for another. That is why we advocate for combination prevention strategies used by people in a rational manner.

Therefore, there is a need for universal health literacy; so that people are empowered to obtain, process, understand and utilize health information in order to make informed decisions about their health and that of others. In order to fight HIV and AIDS or any other disease condition, it is very important for one to have comprehensive knowledge about the disease. For example, if all people who have HIV were known,

put on ARVs and supported to take them with good adherence so that they have undetectable viral loads; then we would have no new HIV infections. This is because an undetectable viral load is untransmittable. There would also be no AIDS related deaths, because death usually happens when people with HIV have what is known as advanced HIV disease or CD4 counts below 200 cells/ml, which happens when they have very high viral loads. Therefore, as we advocated for abstinence from sex for those who can, being faithful to one's partner(s) whose HIV status is known and condom use (ABC) at the beginning of the HIV epidemic in

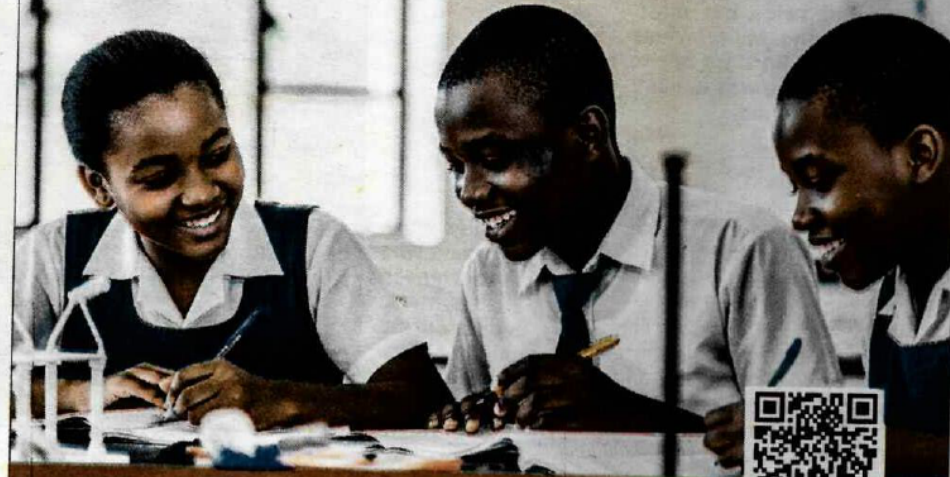
the eighties, we must now also advocate for universal antiretroviral treatment (ART) coverage for all people with HIV in order to achieve zero new HIV infections and zero AIDS related deaths. This is because antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) are what we can use to eliminate the high "community viral load" that is driving new HIV infections and even AIDS related deaths. With the first two zeros achieved, there will be no reason for stigma and discrimination directed towards people with HIV. In conclusion, we need to use all known methods of prevention, including ART in a rational manner in order to end AIDS being a threat to public health by 2030.

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