

We should all fight against HIV/Aids, says Wapakhabulo

Ms Angelina Wapakhabulo is a founding member of Aids Health Foundation, Uganda Cares. She talked to **Fred Wambede**, about her experience, achievement and future plans of the organisation.

How was Uganda Cares established?

Towards the end of 1990s, I was running a conference and event organisation and in the process I linked up with doctors working on HIV/Aids. They wanted someone who can organise for them an event and which I did. It took place in Entebbe and President Museveni was the chief guest. From that moment, instead of being a conference organiser, I become involved in the HIV/Aids fight, which led to the formation of Uganda Cares. It was born out of an association between doctors and leaders like Minister of Agriculture, Mr Ssempiija, and in association with the Ministry of health. In 2002, Uganda cares was able to start treatment on two patients in Masaka referral hospital, where we got a ward allocated to us by the hospital administrators after engagement with relevant authorities. We had two doctors who managed the ward. But of course, the beginning was not easy because many people those days looked at HIV/Aids as a death sentence and initiating a patient to treatment was a complex procedure. Am

happy today, this has to some extent changed compared to the past.

As a founding member, what are the core values of Uganda Cares?

We have a guiding principle from Aid Healthcare Foundation, which is cutting edge medicine and advocacy regardless of the ability to pay.

That is the reason why wherever you go to any clinic managed and founded by Aids Healthcare Foundation, quality and service is the same. The ability to pay is not something that stops one from getting treatment or being cared for. This is to ensure that provision of health care is equitable and accessible to all.

And our mission remains geared towards fighting HIV/Aids in the country through generating innovating ways of treatment, prevention and advocacy.

What are some of the services that Uganda Cares offer?

Uganda Cares has continued to provide quality services to persons infected with HIV/Aids.



Ms Angelina Wapakhabulo the founding member of Aids Health Foundation Uganda Cares during an interview at her home in Mafudu Sironko district. PHOTO BY FRED WAMBEDE

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However, over time, there are many other programmes that have been initiated on the prevention of the virus because we don't want new cases to occur. And these include sensitisation, testing and treating.

We have also carried out leading mass testing initiatives to identify and treat people who are unaware they are infected.

We have also collaborated with other institutions like ministry of health and other organisations including Development Initiative International in various country wide campaigns to fight against the spreading of HIV/Aids in the country.

How has the organization helped in the fight against HIV/Aids in Uganda?

If you can imagine, since 2002, Uganda Cares has been able to reach out to 94,000 people living with HIV/Aids

in the country, I think this is a great contribution. Uganda Cares designs programmes to reach out to the most affected communities in different part of the country to fight the spreading of the epidemic.

We have established over 50 health centres in over 20 districts to offer treatment to people living with HIV/Aids.

How does Uganda Cares empower HIV/Aids patients to live a happy positive life?

We started what is called SEEP, which stands for 'social, economic empowerment programme', where people living with HIV/Aids are given loans to start up small-scale businesses.

This helps to empower them and make them focused and active. This is one of the many ways, Uganda Cares has financially supported persons living with HIV/Aids.

As the organisation marks 15 years of operations, what is your message to the general public, especially when it comes to HIV/Aids?

It's very unfortunate that people are still getting the infection. This, however, calls for urgent attention with stringent and functioning intervention because majority of the most affected are the youth. We have to take precaution and prevent the virus to zero and this is not the fight for one person but a collective responsibility.

But again, it should be noted that it's irresponsible today for one not know his or her HIV status. Let us wake and be part of the collective movement to fight against HIV/Aids. The organisations should partner with government to ensure that messages of HIV/Aids are further pushed to the villages and most especially the focus communities.