

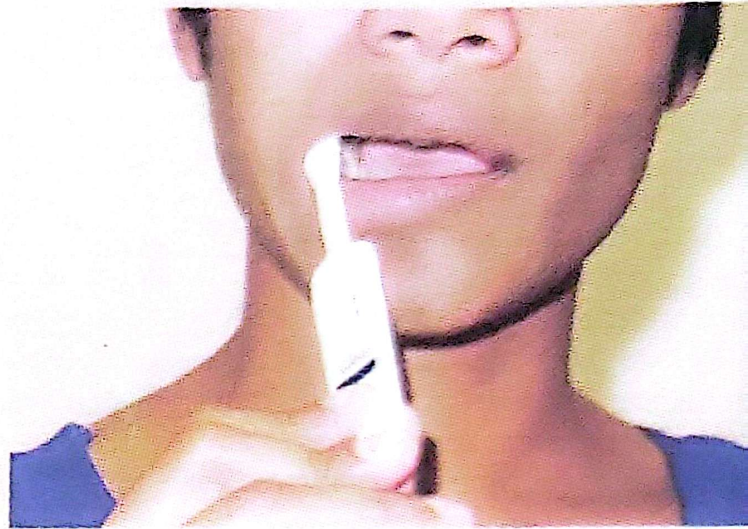
LETTER OF THE DAY

HIV self-test kit good innovation but sensitise people about it

Whereas the plan to introduce an oral HIV self-test kit is a welcome development (See story: 'Healthy ministry to introduce oral HIV self-test kit', *Daily Monitor*; and 'New \$10 HIV self-testing kit unveiled' in *The New Vision* both of July 18, there is need for the Health ministry to tread carefully. This innovation was reportedly premised on the hope that it will prompt men to establish their HIV status. According to Dr Joseph Matovu, "The low uptake of HIV testing services by men in the country informed our study". There is no doubt that this kit, when it is eventually made available and affordable, will help to persuade people (mostly men), who would prefer to establish their sero-status in their privacy to take the test.

However, it poses a potential danger of causing domestic violence. A case in point is the reported incident that occurred during the pilot study in Buliisa District where according to *The New Vision*, a fight ensued after a woman attempted to stealthily check her husband's HIV status while the man was asleep. How ethical this was, is a story for another day.

One of the major components of and vital tool for fighting the spread of HIV is sensitisation and counselling before and after testing (pre and post-test counselling). It is apparent that when this kit is rolled out, one would just walk to the dispensing centre, procure the kit and go and use it. Experience has shown that some people, on knowing that they are HIV positive, tend to get angry with their partners whom they blame for "bringing", rightly or wrongly, the disease. In the absence of a counsellor to manage the anger, confusion and all sorts of psychological



situations come up. We are bound to see many husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends go for their lover's throats. One can also say that such persons may never take on positive leaving behaviour should they not get an opportunity for counselling. How will such people be linked to post-test service centres?

Much effort should be put on sensitising people as plans to introduce the kit is given more thought. The apparent absence of any plans to manage individuals who will use this kit with little or no knowledge of what it exactly means to be HIV positive or negative and the attendant responsibilities makes it imperative for the Health ministry to bring on board other stakeholders for proper implementation.

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