Is it ok for an HIV negative person to marry a positive one?

DOCTOR WATITI

TOWARDS ZERO

Q Dear doctor, Is it true that nowadays HIV positive people are allowed to marry HIV negative individuals in church? In the past, churches used to ask for HIV results before any wedding.

My niece who was born with HIV is going to get married to an HIV negative boy and the pastor who is counselling them knows about it and yet he is not discouraging them. Is this fair? Shall we end AIDS at this rate?

Richard

A Dear Richard,
The decision to stay in or abandon a discordant relationship, where one person is HIV negative while the other is positive should be made by the individuals concerned; preferably after they have been counselled by an HIV competent counsellor. When people make what are known as informed decisions, which are based on knowledge; then discouraging them is not good practice. Of course, another couple in a similar situation, after being counselled may decide not to continue with the relationship and their decision should be respected.

Thankfully, with the advances in science, we now have tools like ARVs for treatment of HIV positive individuals or for prevention as post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for the negative one. Therefore, discordance is much easier to manage. Treating HIV positive individuals with ARVs, causes them to have undetectable viral loads and an undetectable viral load is untransmittable.

Churches and other religious institutions encouraging young people intending to get married to do a medical checkup together is good practice. This should not be limited to HIV alone, although the practice gained prominence because of the HIV epidemic.

Other diseases, whether infectious like gonorrhoea and syphilis; or hereditary, such as sickle cell disease are also important, because they too can be prevented if people know their status and what to do.

We shall end AIDS being a threat to public health if we identify all who are infected and put them on ARVs as we encourage all people to know their HIV status and help the HIV negative individuals to remain negative.

However, to achieve our goal, we must all invest in ending the stigma associated with HIV. Stigma makes people living with or affected by HIV; such as those in discordant relationships to live in fear, shame and hiding. Stigma is often based on myths and misconceptions about HIV; and having comprehensive knowledge of HIV is what will help us overcome it.

