

HER vision

No.1 FOR WOMEN READERS

DR PASQUINE OGUNSANYA RESOLVED TO END HIV



AS UGANDA PREPARES TO COMMEMORATE WORLD AIDS DAY ON DECEMBER 1, VISION GROUP IS SPEARHEADING THE DRIVE TO GET EVERYBODY BACK AND INVOLVED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS. FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER, NEW VISION IS PUBLISHING A SERIES OF STORIES TO HIGHLIGHT KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION. TODAY, CAROLINE KABEGA PROFILES DR PASQUINE OGUNSANYA WHO HAS NURSED HIV/AIDS PATIENTS BACK INTO HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE PEOPLE

DR OGUNSANYA AT HER CLINIC IN NAMUWONGO, KAMPALA. SHE SAYS SINCE 2013, ALL THE HIV-POSITIVE WOMEN THAT GO TO THE CLINIC FOR HEALTHCARE HAVE BEEN GIVING BIRTH TO HIV-NEGATIVE BABIES, WHO REMAIN HIV-NEGATIVE

As a teenager, Dr Pasquine Ogunsanya was shocked when she was scolded for welcoming and serving food and drink to an aunt who looked sick. The head of the home then — another aunt — disposed of the utensils the visitor had used and threw her out. It was believed that her ailment, HIV, would be transmitted through mosquito bites to other members of the home. This incident birthed in Ogunsanya a dream to do something about the strange disease that would deny a relative the regard of her kinsmen.

She also recalls a sombre mood that once welcomed her home when she returned from for holidays from Sacred Heart Secondary School, Gulu in the 1980s. She was perplexed as people talked in low tones about a disease that had ravaged the village, turning even



a once beautiful girl into a skeleton. This was in addition to the rumours around the village that her relatives had the disease.

Ogunsanya's resolve to become a doctor was another incident when her mother gave birth to twins. A mean-looking doctor showed up in the maternity ward and she was told to hide in the bathroom as children were not allowed there.

DID YOU KNOW?
POVERTY IS THE MAJOR REASON ADOLESCENT GIRLS HAVE AN INCREASED RISK OF ACQUIRING HIV.

THE ISSUE

Care should be comprehensive

Witnessing the stigma, discrimination and injustice associated with living with HIV/AIDS, plus the devastating physical, psychosocial and economic effects of the disease, showed Dr Pasquine Ogunsanya the great need for compassionate and comprehensive prevention, care, treatment and support for people living with HIV.

Ogunsanya decided she would study hard to become a doctor to draw children close to her. Ogunsanya's

prayer was answered when in 1990, she won a scholarship to study medicine in Russia. However, while there, many of her relatives and community members died. Every time she received word from home, it would include someone who had died, including her then teenage sister, who she suspected to have succumbed to AIDS.

In 1997, while doing internship at Mulago Hospital, she saw many more people suffering and dying from AIDS. At the time, antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) were limited and not available to most people in Uganda. Therefore, many people living with HIV would simply wait to die. Her personal experience drew her to deliver compassionate care to the

sick and vulnerable. She recognised that even if there was no medication, people living with HIV/AIDS should feel loved.

"I believe that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity," Ogunsanya said.

Witnessing the stigma, discrimination and injustice associated with living with HIV/AIDS, plus the devastating physical, psychosocial and economic effects of the disease, showed Ogunsanya the great need for compassionate and comprehensive prevention, care, treatment and support for people living with HIV.

This need for complete, holistic services motivated her to do something to support people living with HIV/AIDS.

At the time, she was living in Namuwongo, a Kampala suburb and was working in a clinic. Namuwongo is a densely populated slum, with some of the residents having fled



DR OGUNSANYA

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