

The Roles of peer Educators in HIV Prevention. (Why peers should care and how)

Who is a peer educator?

A peer educator can simply mean a person belonging to a group of similar experiences or life style that is trained or supervised to bring about change in understanding, behavioural and positive decisions.

What is Peer Education?

Peer Education is an approach to health promotion where community members are supported to promote health enhancing change among their peers or those who may share similar social backgrounds or life experiences?

Such similarities may include similar background, similar culture or social status or age groups, beliefs, lifestyles etc

Peer educator activities involve:

- a) **A discussion of issues or sensitive matters** with people you know and trust. Hence positive changes in minds about practicing risky behaviours that may encourage the spread of HIV and Aids.
- **What risky behaviours-**Discuss and expect answers like:
 - Basic facts about STDs
 - Irresponsible sexual acts
 - Multiple sex partners
 - Drug and alcohol use
 - Unfaithful sexual relationships

What are non risky behaviours?

- Use of condom
- Treatment adherence
- Safe sex and safe injecting drugs
- Mutual fidelity
- Abstinence
- Testing and counselling about HIV
- Informed decisions and delayed sexual intercourse.

Activities continue

- b) **Trusted and credible source of information** is gained through **Peer educator initiative**. Thus
- Shared explicit and honest information that is essential in prevention of HIV spreading
 - Better and **trusted referrals** that will assist those already infected and reduce individual vulnerability.

Such information as:

What to do when you are HIV positive:

- Seek medical attention from trusted sources e.g. Mildmay
- Access counselling that may help you deal with emotional stress.
- Be concerned to know more about what to avoid to keep healthy
- Know how to prevent spreading to others e.g. partner, mother to child transmission

continue

c) **A clear informed discussion to peer groups about sexual intercourse** and or a need to delay the age of first sex based awareness gained through peer education. **Such questions answered include:**

- Knowing HIV status of the person you are to have a sexual relationship with.
- Concern about reducing the number of sex partners
- Using a condom
- Safer practices like safe injecting drug practices
- Healthy sexual behaviours e.g. making responsible and informed decisions about when
- Voluntary counselling
- Circumcision

continue

d) Open discussions with peers by a **peer education helps in reducing HIV related stigma and discrimination .Hence:**

- People are able to learn that there is life after HIV
- learn and understand the care and support needed by those infected.

Eventually develop:

- Self disclosure as a result support and care given
- Respect as a result of connections with other peers
- Empathy through understanding that an HIV positive peer needs care and understanding.
- Trust and genuineness.
- Boosted self esteem
- Reduces vulnerability.

Activities continues

e) **Peer Educators can help in improving advocacy for improved access to user friendly sexual health and drug services.**

This is because:

- There is basic information about HIV and other related STDs
- Motivation to seeking treatment
- Reliable information about HIV services e.g. referrals
- Shared experiences from friends
- Informed awareness
- Voluntary counselling
- Improved knowledge and eventually behavioural changes.

Note:

Behavioural change doesn't just happen. It takes a lot of **knowledge, trust and confidentiality.**

Activities continues

f) **Peer educators** provide first hand information and care which builds confidence through peer connections and motivation by:

Reaching many other peers and building a network of groups that enhance awareness to others.

Hence peers that were **unaware will be exposed to knowledge, education and information.**

Once **aware** they are **concerned** and once concerned are **motivated** to modify their way of life by practicing **sustained behavioural change.**

Well informed, well guided and supported the peer group would look into how best he /she can **maintain this behavioural change** and how positive he/she can assist others to this change through similar formed peer groups.

why and how the peers should care ?

- The fight about HIV prevention is part and parcel of our responsibility or to be exact a responsibility of peers and more.
- The fight against stigma, discrimination and generally vulnerability of key population or peers requires knowledge and motivation.
- Peer education and indeed peer educators create a means through which an individual finds a voice and guidance to improving the rights of an individual and society at large.
- Peer Educators are therefore volunteers that educate and support peers to influence social change in fighting HIV .