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HIV in the Gambia

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As a person living with HIV (PLHIV) the author speaks frequently in public about the challenges faced by PLHIV. PLHIVs, especially women and girls face serious problems of stigma and discrimination. We need to address stigma and discrimination by developing a stigma reduction strategy, demystify ignorance and the fear of AIDS. The author also believe that we PLHIV are best placed to stop the further spread of the virus by disclosing our status and create more awareness among individuals and communities of the need for behavior change. We need to promote correct and consistent use of condoms to prevent the spread of the virus. Santa Yalla organizes training workshops on HIV for the members to create awareness about positive living for PLHIV. People want to know if the author still having sex and if yes, with whom. They want to know whether his children know his HIV status. We also conduct community HIV sensitizations meetings. We invite five villages in one forum. We meet with the village chiefs and elders and explain our mission and agreed with the chiefs that each village should come with two elderly men, two elderly women, three boys and three girls, and they will all assemble in the bigger village in that surrounding, and if the village chiefs agreed we select and agreed on a date for the meeting, and they should announce it to every-body in their communities. After all these we do a follow up to see if the announcement have reached everyone to attend the meeting, and we invite the Imam and the Pastor to do the opening prayers to bless the occasion. After the opening prayers, the introduction is done by the program manager, followed by presentation by a PLHIV during which we cover: HIV/AIDS and STIs, HIV counseling and testing, importance of PMTCT, HIV stigma and discrimination, care and support for PLHIV. We provide counseling and testing with partners. We do the counseling and our partner provides testing services. Taking this approach, we have made a lot of progress; a high number of people now know their HIV status. Follow up after testing is also conducted to those who tested positive to support them enrolls into care and into the HIV support groups. It can be concluded that, for effective response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic, concerted efforts are required and PLHIVs actively participate in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the HIV program.

Biography

Lamin Ceesay works at the Santa Yalla Support Society since January 1999. He started advocating for universal access to treatment care and support for people living with HIV since December 2000.

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