

THE ROLE OF PHYSIOTHERAPY IN PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

Physiotherapy plays a role in caring and treatment of people suffering from conditions related to HIV/Aids worldwide. It helps in optimization of life in these patients.

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the lentivirus that can lead to development of AIDS. This is a condition in which the human defense mechanism starts to fail and the body progressively deteriorates. It can affect any human being regardless of age or gender. It's usually transmitted through shared blood, vaginal fluid, semen and breast milk.

In the past, concern of disability due HIV was excluded from major HIV reports until 2009. Uptodate the role of Physiotherapy in HIV patients is over looked and that's why there are not included in most multi disciplined teams caring for HIV patients at hospital or even at provincial level. Most of people living with HIV live in sub Saharan Africa. It has been noted especially in sub Saharan Africa that most HIV/AIDS patient have lengthened period of stay in hospital due to multisystem pathology of the diseases. This brings up complications such as contractures, muscle wastage, stiff joints, bedsores and respiratory. Disability can be due to HIV as a disease, secondary side effects and the side effects of treatment. This establishes the need for physiotherapeutic care. UN recognized HIV and disability has one of the major problems facing the populations in Africa

Physiotherapy in acute stage

Physiotherapists are experts in body movements and exercises that's why they take a primary role in treatment of HIV/Aids patients both during acute and rehabilitation phases. In acute stage Physiotherapists are involved in the following ways depending on the presentation of the patient:

- Maintaining clear the pulmonary system by clearing chest secretions and expanding lung tissue if there is a collapse
- Maintaining the normal joint ranges and increasing circulation to dependant limbs by doing passive mobilization.
- Postural correction to prevent any deformities.

.Physiotherapy in Chronic Stage/Rehabilitation Stage

Physiotherapists work with all health providers as a team viz Doctors, Nurses, Occupational therapists, and Social workers only to mention a few. The advances in the treatment of HIV have resulted in increased life expectance in people living with HIV as long as they have access to the new treatment regime. But due to the medicinal or disease effects, the chances of these people developing disability are very high. A wide range of problems are likely arising from neurological, musculoskeletal and painful syndromes. All these problems can be alleviated through Physiotherapy interventions by applying the following depending on the presentation of the patient;

- Maintaining the normal joint ranges and increasing circulation to dependant limbs by doing passive mobilization.

- Stretching exercises as a prevention of painful contractures
- Restoration of body image due to weight loss by strengthening wasted muscles
- Pain management by using electrotherapy
- Active mobilization through to independent walking
- Provision of assistive device i.e. Crutches, walking sticks etc
- Health promotion advice
- Postural correction to prevent any deformities

Conclusion

Patients attending Physiotherapy recover quickly to independence and are discharged early from the hospital. Inclusion of Physiotherapy services in all HIV/AIDS care manifesto will prevent development of patient complications and earlier intervention to those with complications. The saying that prevention is better than cure can be proved. Rehabilitation makes a difference in people living with HIV by making them active once again and allowing them to participate in the economy of the nation.

Article by Patrick Simfukwe (Edendale Hospital Physiotherapy manager)