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Kenyan researcher claims success in search of Aids drug

Kenya Medical Research Institute's Charles Mbakaya, like President Thabo Mbeki, writes Victor Bwire, believes there is a nutrition angle to the Aids pandemic and that is what is guiding his research.

First there was Dr Davy Koech of the Kenya Medical Research Institute (Kemri) and the discovery of Kemron as an Aids drug in 1989. It is no longer heard of.

Then came Prof Arthur Obel a decade later. Some say he was designated Chief Government Scientist and his Aids drug was called Pearl Omega.

Apart from flouting established scientific research procedures in announcing the drug's advent, Pearl Omega, too, is rarely heard of these days.

But now, there is a new kid on the block with a different approach to the search for an Aids management formula.

He is not saying his is the alpha and omega to the Aids pandemic, but like South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki, he says that Aids is not all about sex. There is the nutrition angle to think about.

It was when reading a copy of the *British Journal* some 15 years ago, a Kenyan scientist, Charles Mbakaya, made a note that still torments him to this day.

The journal reported that HIV positive people depicted symptoms similar to those in people with a deficiency of zinc in their systems.

Even more important, was the journal's suggestion that the mineral zinc was essential in the biosynthesis of proteins, production of thymulin and interferon's which have scientifically proved to be very essential in the human immunity system.

Two years ago, Mbakaya, who is a senior science researcher at the Kenya Medical Research Institute (Kemri), embarked on the long journey for the search of a zinc laden supplement that could help in reducing the viral load in HIV positive people.

"As researcher I developed an interest in the possible role nutrition could play in health promotion, especially in immuno-compromised persons," says Mbakaya.



Charles Mbakaya

"In any case, I have never believed that Aids is singularly a function of sex. Why is it more prevalent in nutrition deprived areas and commonly symptomised by loss of weight?" he asks.

The Nairobi analytical science graduate then picked on VIUSID - due to its high zinc content - to investigate its possible role in the management of HIV patients in Kenya.

VIUSID is a nutritional preparation specially designed to facilitate the increase of the immunological deficiencies in all body processes that cause immunodeficiency.

The antioxidant substances of VIUSID have the capacity to eliminate the effects of the free radicals that appear in all the infectious processes.

It contains honey, Maleic acid, Glycyrrhizic acid, Arginine, Glucosamine, Glycine, Ascorbic acid, Pyridoxal, Folic acid Calcium Pantotenate, Zinc Sulphate and Cyanocobalamin.

Through a new technology of molecular activation, the chemical activities of the various ingredients of VIUSID have greatly been enhanced without changing its molecular structure.

It is manufactured by a Spanish company - CATALYSIS Ltd and locally distributed by Management Solutions.

It has been approved and is widely used in 17 African countries. One is advised to take 3 sachets a day for so long as he gets better. A sachet goes for Sh100.

So two years ago, with consent from his employers and assisted by Winfred Kisingu from Kemri and Dr Patrick Orege from the National Aids Control Council (NACC), Mbakaya then started his long journey to the unknown.

Forty four persons from the Association of People Living with Aids (TAPWAK), a national organisation helping HIV positive individuals to live a comfortable and positive life, were chosen for the study.

"During the initial stages of the study, we experienced a lot of problems. Ten people dropped out of the study due to personal problems while four later turned out to be HIV negative on further tests," Mbakaya says.

The soft spoken Mbakaya says more difficulties were to come as three more died and professional sarcasm from colleagues weighed in with morale as the main target.

Mbakaya says that during a seminar in Zimbabwe, he remembers several scientists dismissing his study.

Many were of the view that the sample size was very small and questioned the rationale of choosing that particular supplement and not others.

In Lesotho during a meeting of scientific researchers, several participants expressed dissatisfaction with Mbakaya's study.

He remembers one participant saying "That is not a study worthy listening

to. The guys spent all the time just observing an uncontrolled objects than deal with a controlled sample.”

But others have been very supportive of the study to the extent that it has started shaping the HIV management agenda on the African Continent.

“Many of the researchers we have shared the results with have expressed their support. They believe that in resource stricken countries, the benefits of our finding far outweigh the long held views on the pandemic,” says Mbakaya.

The results released after 24 months have shown that VIUSID has the capacity to reduce the viral load in HIV positive individuals by over 50 per cent and complete wipe it out sometimes.

Within 3 months of using the supplement, 80 per cent of the patients reported that signs and symptoms associated with HIV such as persistent headaches, night sweats, diarrhoea, itchy skin, rashes and loss of appetite had resolved.

“Some patients even asked if they could be provided with food to match their increased appetites,” Mbakaya says.

Within one year of the study, more than 90 per cent of the patients experienced a significant weight gain, with some gaining as much as 10 kilogrammes.

Additionally, the HIV anti-bodies of the patients almost doubled up within the 24 months of follow-up. This is an indication that their acquired immunity against HIV had been stimulated.

Visible changes start being observed after 7 days of use and in three months of uninterrupted use opportunistic infections disappear.

In 52 per cent of the patients, their viral load reduced by 50 per cent within the study period, with 19 per cent attaining undetectable viral load levels.

Clinically, the VIUSID has no marked side effects. All the patients showed normal liver functions, an indication that it had no toxic effects on the patients.


Mbakaya says that from that, it was clear that it could be used for an extended period of time.

“Our study then confirms what other scientists have observed; that micro nutrient zinc may be a critical factor in the transmission and progression of Aids,” Mbakaya emphatically concludes.

The researcher then advises that “nutrition has a critical role in the management of HIV in resource deprived countries such as Kenya.”

Above all, VIUSID has the capacity to reduce the incidence of opportunistic diseases related to HIV, resulting in improved quality of life for the patients.

Additionally, the supplement improves appetite, increases weight and increases patients immunity.



Mbakaya, 39, vows not to rest until home-grown solution for Aids are found.

He dismisses the current notion about the transmission of the deadly disease, echoing South African's President Thabo Mbeki that Africa should not wholly believe the Europeans' views about HIV/Aids.

"There are other hidden cures for the disease other than the drugs and vaccines being clamoured for," Mbakaya says.

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THE SOCIAL SCENE

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