



Global Strategies for HIV Prevention A Generation Free From HIV

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It's amazing what a hundred doses of a medicine can do.

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Several months ago we received a call from Dr. William Hoffman. He and his wife, both physicians, were about to return to Tanzania with the support of the Moravian Church. He asked if we could provide 100 doses of nevirapine tablets and nevirapine syrup to treat HIV infected mothers and their infants. Although the rural area of Tanzania to which they were returning had a hospital and clinic, there was no HIV prevention program.

100 tablets of nevirapine will fit into one small plastic bottle – the size that you might use to take daily vitamins on a trip. And yet, this amount of nevirapine is enough to save as many as 50 infants from fatal HIV infection. It hardly seemed possible that it could have a major impact on the HIV epidemic in Tanzania where as many as 30% of pregnant women are infected.

When Dr. Hoffman returned and spoke to us we were filled with enthusiasm and wanted to share some of his comments with you.

“Before nevirapine was available no one wanted to discuss HIV. There was little to no acknowledgment that HIV was even a problem. When people found out that we had nevirapine and that it was used for prevention of HIV infection of infants, they wanted to participate. After years of denial about HIV, they now wanted to have HIV testing and counseling - it turned things around.”

“The situation in Tanzania is primarily denial. Blood is tested for HIV but when it turns out to be positive the individual is sent home after telling them it does not cross match. Other individuals who are tested are not counseled or provided any information on prevention.”

“When we started offering nevirapine people wanted to know their HIV status and wanted to receive counseling. We set up a two-week training course, which included health-care workers and a pastor from a local church. After the training the pastor began to talk about HIV in his church. It was clear that nevirapine was the big draw. We ran out of HIV test kits.”

“In the entire year before we offered nevirapine there was only one person tested for HIV in the whole area - within the first several weeks of offering nevirapine 50 mothers were voluntarily tested and counseled. Ten percent were positive. All five infected mothers and their infants received nevirapine. Mrs. Mafassi, the Permanent Secretary of Health, heard about the program and came to learn about it. We then went to speak to the chief medical officer of Tanzania who indicated that nevirapine was a registered drug and enthusiastically embraced what we were doing.”

“The availability of nevirapine made the difference. Without your donation everything would have remained the same – denial and discouragement. We plan to return to Tanzania to continue the program and further expand voluntary counseling and testing and programs for the prevention of HIV transmission from mothers to their infants.”

We are fortunate to be able to continue our “Save a Life” program, providing life saving nevirapine to hospital and clinics in the developing world. With the financial help of many individuals and the now almost \$150,000 received from national Presbyterian churches we are assisting over 40 hospitals and clinics in 15 different countries. In less than a year we will reach over 30,000 HIV infected pregnant women and their infants.

There is additional good news. Several months ago the Catholic Medical Mission Board, one of our new collaborators, informed us that they would be able to obtain the combined mother and infant dose of nevirapine in certain countries for 85 cents instead of the \$4 discounted dose that we had been using. In these locations, with each \$4, we can treat 5 times as many HIV infected infants and save 5 times as many lives. We are reminded of the parable of the fishes and loaves – the two fish and the few loaves of bread given by a child, fed thousands.

Soon the requests for nevirapine to prevent HIV infection of infants will exceed our financial resources. We wish to thank you for your support in the past and your continued support in the future.

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