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Liberia, HIV/AIDS-Infectious diseases

Liberia: Saving Lives by Preventing HIV/AIDS

Could you imagine living with a terrible disease, which you knew you could receive treatment for? Forty-three thousand people in Liberia are living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) (Front Page Africa, 2017). Typically, your average family cannot even afford medications, let alone specialized treatment for HIV/AIDS, and this disease is easily spread (Front Page Africa, 2017). Imagine walking through a neighborhood filled with disease and death, families living in illness, unable to take care of their own children, because a disease is running their lives. I cannot imagine living like this for days, weeks, months, let alone years.

The disease rate is very high but HIV/AIDS is the worst spread disease in Liberia (UNAIDS, 2018). Medications are scarce that only eighteen point seven percent of people infected by HIV/AIDS are on Antiretroviral Therapy (Front Page Africa, 2017). Annually two thousand eight hundred people die from this disease every year, which is including men, women, and children (Front Page Africa, 2017). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has done some studies, mainly studies done on pregnant women with HIV/AIDS, since these studies, prevalence of pregnant women with this disease has basically diminished (Front Page Africa, 2017). Additional studies could be done, but on the other infected people that are not pregnant to further expand and provide awareness for all infected with this HIV/AIDS.

The first transmitter of the disease was a female named Zorzo Lofa from Northwest Liberia (African Health Observatory, 2017). After finding this out, it prompted the government of Liberia to create the National AIDS and STI Control Programme (African Health Observatory, 2017). The National AIDS and STI Control is in charge of monitoring the infected people. The sad part is these organizations say they are going to something about this problem, but they don't actually do it (African Health Observatory, 2017). If this organization actually monitored the infected civilians then they would have tried to control the outbreak. These organizations can work with United States or United Nations organizations that do similar tasks, to see ways they can improve and make sure they are reaching all that are infected.

Once the country of Liberia figured out there was an outburst of this disease, they came out with precautions (African Health Observatory, 2017). These precautions are basic ones like to prevent the flu. The precautions consist of; hand washing, wear personal protective gear (gown, goggles, and mask), careful handling and disposing of sharp objects, careful disposing of body fluids, careful handling of soiled linen, and sterilization (liberia_art.pdf, 2007). Body fluids is the main transmitter, needles are as well (HIV.gov, 2017). HIV can also be carried into an infant from their mother, but that is very rare (NHS, 2015). HIV cannot be transmitted by casual contact, saliva, sweat, or tears (HIV.gov, 2017). You have to be trading some kind of body fluid that doesn't include saliva.

In the United States, people who are mainly infected with HIV are men who sexually interact with other men, women who sexually interact with other women, prisoners, African Americans, Hispanics, Transgenders, and people who inject drugs (Avert, 2018). Studies have come to show that African Americans are the most infected ethnic group, they account for over 44% of the infections (Avert, 2018). Hispanics are the second most affected ethnic group in the United States, Hispanics account for 24% of infections (Avert, 2018).

What are some symptoms of HIV/AIDS? Some symptoms of HIV/AIDS are pain in the abdomen, sore throat, dry cough, fatigue, loss of appetite, fever, malaise, sweating, ulcers, or white tongue (Planned Parenthood, 2018). If any of these symptoms occur your first instinct would be to go get medical attention. The issue with that is in Liberia they don't have the medical systems like the United States does, America's medical system is very advanced but, Liberia's hospitals run like ours did in the early sixties.

In Liberia, they have very poor access to treatment, which is a major problem since this is very deadly disease (Pheage, 2017). Their healthcare systems all collapsed during the civil war, with that, went all of their access to medical attention (McKay, 2015). The government is still trying to rebuild the health systems but may not have the funds for some items (McKay, 2015). Currently the number of health buildings are back up to the number that is was before war (McKay, 2015). As for HIV/AIDS treatment there isn't really a cure for this disease, but most people get antiretroviral therapy, which helps prolong life (McKay, 2015).

There are ways to prevent AIDS, but you must be negative for HIV before taking these precautions (TRUVADA, 2018). The precautions include taking PrEP, or TRUVADA (TRUVADA, 2018). With TRUVADA you want to get checked for HIV every three months (TRUVADA, 2018). Take either one of these medication when preventing, but take it every day and never miss a dose (TRUVADA, 2018). If you miss a dose, that could raise your chances for getting HIV. These products have a 92% success rate (TRUVADA, 2018).

In 2010, United States President, Barack Obama created the first HIV/AIDS strategy (Avert, 2018). This was updated in 2015 to run the program until 2020 (Avert, 2018). This program has four main focuses, reducing new infections, increasing access to medical attention and improving health outcomes, reducing HIV related disparities and health inequities, and achieving a national response to the epidemic (Avert, 2018). After President Donald Trump was elected in 2016 there were concerns over how the new administrations would approach HIV (Avert, 2018). By the end of 2017, there were no board members left on the PACHA, and still none have been recruited (Avert, 2018).

In your average family, the prevalence for HIV/AIDS, of a typical family of five, is that two people would be affected, which is at least one parent and one child (Kruk et.al, 2011). Typically, the child that gets diagnosed at an early age or is born with this disease does not live to be very old (AIDS info, 2017). Honestly that is very sad, families should support you. Your average household income is about 43,785 in Liberian dollars but most households don't even make that, which is approximately two hundred eighty-nine US dollars (New Narrative, 2011). Health care is extremely challenging to find but if you find it, it may be very pricey (Kruk et.al, 2011). Most civilians that are trying to reach proper medical attention spend up to One Thousand Liberian Dollars just to travel to the doctors, which is equivalent to 14 US Dollars (Lysander, 2011).

After being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, you should maintain a nutritious diet (HIV.gov, 2017). The average food items that Liberian families eat are cassava, fish, bananas, citrus fruit, plantains, coconut, okra, and sweet potatoes (Wikipedia, 2018). The most popular dish is habanero and scotch bonnets served with fufu (Wikipedia, 2018). With every fifth household, they are food insecure, which means lots of homes are not receiving the nutrition they need (USAID, 2016). The average diet for HIV/AIDS is lots of fruit, vegetables, and starchy carbohydrates (WebMD, 2017).

Liberia's main exports are natural rubber, rice, cassava, bananas, and palm oil (Wikipedia, 2018). They grow mass productions of these items because their climate is perfect for them. The climate in Liberia is humid and very warm year round, but they have a very dry season (Wikipedia, 2018). Liberia is in a Sub-Saharan in West Africa six degrees North and nine degrees West (Wikipedia, 2018). Liberia borders the Atlantic Ocean to the Southwest and three other African nations on other sides (Wikipedia, 2018). They

have forty-seven percent of arable land to be able to grow crops on (Wikipedia, 2018). Over all though Liberia is 69,201.79 square kilometers in land size, but only 4.04% is in arable land for producers and families to utilize (Wikipedia, 2018).

Liberia is split fifty-fifty between urban and rural communities (Wikipedia, 2018). Houses in Liberia are very old and are not built the best, some homes are like shacks but others are like a trailer (Nations Encyclopedia, 2017). Eight to ten people have working toilets, but others have to go outside (Water Aid, 2017). But overall Liberia has really clean water and only a few homes have running water otherwise they go to a well (Water Aid, 2017). Unhealthy living conditions are not good for the welfare of humans. Little kids might play where there neighbor defecated, which can spread so many diseases, especially since little kids put everything in their mouth. Liberia has some of the best education in Africa, and almost every child goes to school up until they are 11 (UNICEF, 2017). Some common jobs in Liberia is a sales clerk, accountant, doctors, and basically the same jobs that one could find here in America (Jobserve Africa, 2018).

George Weah is the President of Liberia and plans on helping the economy, provide free health care, more jobs, and free education (D'amours, 2017). How will he provide all this for 4.614 million people, their economy can barely feed a family? Liberia's government is presidential representative democratic republic (Chepkemoui, 2018). That means their president acts as the head of state and the head of the government, this democracy started in 1847 (Chepkemoui, 2018). Donald Trump and George Weah both want their countries to have good health care. Maybe they could collaborate their ideas and come up with a solution that will help both countries out in the long run.

Overall, this disease has worsened over the years, so let's help these sick people. My proposal is that we partner with a HIV/AIDS program here in the United States. Some programs are, The Elizabeth Taylor Aids Foundation that has grants and programs established in Johannesburg, Africa and Sudafrica, Africa (The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation, 2018). I would propose working with The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation and applying for a grant to be utilized in Liberia. The Magic Johnson Foundation does more prevention and awareness, and the Aids United do a lot of stuff for other countries. Working along with these two organizations would provide additional support to reach the masses of the country.

These people that are infected need help and to get some knowledge on how to care for themselves. We need to reach out to all of these organizations and have these groups all team up. When thinking for a solution to this problem, you have to think about the medical treatment, food, and just someone to tell them what they need to do to care for themselves. They would need medications; therefore we will need to have doctors that specialize in HIV/AIDS to send their nurses once a month to assist individuals in Liberia. At these visits they would provide medication, and teach them how to properly care for themselves, possibly give out soap, toothbrushes, and toothpaste. These sick individuals just need someone to tell them they will be ok, they are probably scared.

Social media plays a big role in America, and everyone likes good publicity. We could create a page on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. to allow more people to be informed of the horrible things that go on in Liberia. Most people just need an eye-opener, on the social media page we could say how you can help and link a website. Almost 44% of businesses use social media for awareness (SmallBizTrends, 2017). Even fundraiser or dinner banquets would help, where funds could be raised to assist with sending nurses overseas as well as informing those in attendance of the issue at hand. These dinners could be similar to hunger awareness dinners that are used to educate individuals on the issue of hunger around the world.

The best way to help this issue is to spread the word about it, but we could have programs that go to more than just Liberia, it could go all over the world. Maybe once all the leaders that are allies with, would see that we are trying to help with this and they would join in. Like people say, be the change you want to see

in the world. It starts with one person and it can backfire or it can spread like wildfire, you never know what will happen.

I understand this project would take a lot of money but if we told tax payers this is one of the places your money goes to, they would probably feel good because they were helping sick people. I understand the tax money has to go to other places but we could make the amount of money that goes to other things go down. If you want to look at the publicity side of this, it would make the U.S. look great. Yearly the government gathers close to 3.7 trillion dollars from taxes, with some funds that are used towards health (USGovernmentRevenue, 2018).

The U.S. already is the greatest funder to the global response to this disease (Avert.2018). Some of these funds could be used for training to assist these individuals overseas for individuals to then share and implement in their communities. After the initial funding, local individuals could make and sell various crafts to provide funding for these initiatives as well as the medicine that is needed. Other funds could come from pharmaceutical reps in donations of medicine that can be utilized. Something else that maybe something to consider is to have missionaries that know about this stuff do a mission trip in Liberia and talk about HIV.

Even if we didn't use government money we could use financial support money. There is a loan for AIDS Research Loan Repayment Program helps to train researchers (benefits.gov, 2018). If we partnered up with more businesses like these we could get so much more financial support. With projects like these you can't do it alone it needs as much help as possible. Teamwork is the most important thing with large projects, it's hard to do these things alone.

When teaching these classes they need to talk about proper care for yourself when living with this disease. Some things to talk about are when to take medication, how to contact their local hospitals, eat nutritiously, and get the right exercise. You need to get correct exercise to keep yourself fit, and to help prolong your life. The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach office could team up with a YMCA and give presentations about eating healthy, being clean, and getting exercise. This could be a component that could be added along with the nurses arriving to take care of medical needs. Having individuals to help reach out to individuals for them to learn how to better take care of themselves will be crucial for long term success of this plan.

In conclusion, I believe as a nation we will be able to help these dying sick people of Liberia. Many of whom are not able to currently afford the health care that will allow them to either avoid contracting AIDS/HIV or be able to treat themselves to control the disease. As the old Chinese proverb says "You give a poor man a fish, and you feed him for a day. You teach him to fish and you give him an occupation that will feed him for a lifetime". For this specific topic that proverb perfectly describes my solution for this. By reaching out and teaching individuals in Liberia everything they need to know to take care of themselves, how to help others, and provide adequate access to medication, the leaders in Liberia can make a difference. These few individuals could help millions of people and potentially save lives.

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