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THE USE OF HIV POSITIVE HEALTH CARE VOLUNTEERS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT HIV/AIDS IN LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENTS

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The prevalence of HIV is high among South African women. We previously established that women in a low income community in South Africa had general HIV/AIDS knowledge but were unable to identify essential prevention behaviours. It was also established that health care volunteers provided support within the community.

As part of a larger study, a qualitative interview was conducted with an HIV positive health care volunteer who offers social support in the area. This volunteer has no formal training but after being diagnosed with HIV 18 years ago, she attended short courses and sat in on nursing lectures in order to educate herself about HIV.

She now uses her knowledge to help people with HIV live a better life and has received recognition through educating others via motivational speaking. She is regarded as someone people can confide in, and get assistance from, in her words a “community counsellor”. She also visits schools to create awareness about HIV. Her work indicates that listening to first-hand experience of a person who is HIV positive increases the level of engagement. Furthermore receiving information from someone who is not an authoritative figure is a different approach and a welcome change because of the stigma that still surrounds HIV.

We conclude that if more HIV positive people are trained to educate others, it will go a long way in increasing knowledge about HIV transmission, uptake of voluntary testing as well as the removal of the stigma that surrounds HIV.

Biography

Firoza Haffeejee completed her PhD in 2013 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She is currently a senior lecturer in Physiology and Epidemiology at the Durban University of Technology in South Africa. She runs community engagement projects in Kenneth Gardens, a low socio-economic environment in the city of Durban, where she has also worked on research projects in collaboration with members from Virginia Commonwealth University. Her research is currently funded by the National Research Foundation (South Africa).

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