



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
FACULTY OF MEDICINE

December 1, 2015

NEWS RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL DECEMBER 1, 2015 at 12:01 a.m.

**Cameroonian Disability Leaders Launch Free Resource for Health Providers to Manage HIV in Africa**

Millions of people are now living with – rather than dying from -- HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa due to combination drug therapies. But the vast majority struggle to manage the many disabilities caused by this disease and its treatment. Today, advocates in Cameroon, Zambia, South Africa, Kenya, and Canada launched a free [website](#) to help health workers improve the quality of life of adults and children living with HIV throughout Africa.

“Now that many people in Sub-Saharan Africa are accessing life-saving treatment, new responses are needed to support people as they grow up and grow older with HIV,” said Dr. Esther Munalula Nkandu, senior lecturer at the University of Zambia and Africa Regional Representative for the World Confederation for Physical Therapy. “The rehabilitation sector is not yet integrated into the health response for the 24 million people living with HIV in much of the continent. Many people living longer with HIV are thinking about their future hopes and dreams. Rehabilitation can help people with the goals that matter to them.”

HIV can cause disease in every part of the body. Because it targets the immune system, infections and other diseases are a constant threat. Techniques like chest physiotherapy, for example, help people with lung infections breathe effectively. The neurological system is a target for HIV damage, leading to strokes, spinal cord infections and nerve damage in legs. These problems require rehabilitation to help people walk, swallow, live independently, and support themselves and their families.

The medications that allow people to live with HIV can cause problems to the heart, lungs and liver. People living long-term on HIV treatments can also experience bone death in their hips and knees. Rehabilitation helps people address the impact of these conditions on their daily lives. For example, physiotherapists help to manage pain and increase function and mobility. Occupational therapists devise “workarounds” and other ways for people achieve their goals. And speech therapists help people learn to swallow and talk after brain injury. Rehabilitation also addresses the profound stigma related to both HIV and to disability.

Today, more than seven million people throughout Africa have access to the medications, out of 24 million living with HIV. But there are few rehabilitation resources to help people live well with HIV. This international team is [attempting](#) to bring rehabilitation in the context of HIV to the continent on a meaningful scale.

“This resource will be very useful for a wide range of organizations, including disabled people’s organizations in our region,” said Sam Nyingcho, a disability and HIV advocate in Bamenda, Cameroon.

The free website, entitled **“How Rehabilitation Can Help People Living with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Evidence-Informed Tool for Rehab Providers”**, was adapted from a [Canadian resource](#) and is also downloadable for use on paper.

“At a time when Option B+ is being scaled up in Cameroon, including this module in the training of health care providers is a dynamic way of mainstreaming disability in HIV care and treatment,” stated Mr. Awa Jacques Chirac, Program Manager of the Socio Economic Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities of the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Board.

“It’s designed to be a one-stop resource for physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other health workers who can quickly and easily research the most common HIV-related disabilities, and find evidence-based rehabilitation solutions”, says project lead Dr. Stephanie Nixon, who is Director of the University of Toronto’s International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation ([ICDR](#)) and co-founder of the Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation ([www.hivandrehab.ca](http://www.hivandrehab.ca)).

This innovation was funded by [Grand Challenges Canada](#). Grand Challenges Canada is funded by the Government of Canada and is dedicated to supporting Bold Ideas with Big Impact in global health.

For more information about the website, please [visit](#) University of Toronto’s Department of Physical Therapy.

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