



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MEDICINE

December 1, 2015

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

UNZA Researchers Launch Free Resource for Health Providers to Manage HIV in Africa

Millions of people with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa are living normal lives due to a combination of drug therapies. But the vast majority struggle to manage the many disabilities caused by the disease and its treatment.

However, researchers at the **University of Zambia** and their partners in South Africa, Kenya, and Canada have launched a free [website](#) to help health workers improve the quality of life of adults and children living with HIV throughout Africa.

“Better responses are needed to support people in Sub-Saharan Africa as they live their lives with HIV,” said Dr. Esther Munalula Nkandu, a senior lecturer at the University of Zambia and Africa Regional Representative for the World Confederation for Physical Therapy.

“The rehabilitation sector needs to be integrated into the HIV health response. People with HIV are thinking about their future, being productive and raising their families. Rehabilitation can help them achieve their goals,” she said.

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 lives.

For example, physiotherapists help to manage pain and increase function and mobility. Occupational therapists devise “workarounds” and other ways for people to 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, the growing numbers of over 24 million people living with HIV throughout Africa have access to treatment. But there are few rehabilitation resources to help people live well with HIV. This international team is working to strengthen rehabilitation in the context of HIV across the region.

“We need to work together to incorporate rehabilitation into HIV care, policy and research throughout Africa,” said Dr. Margaret Mweshi, lecturer at the University of Zambia, School of Medicine.

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.

“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](#).

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.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Dr. Esther Munalula Nkandu
Senior Lecturer
School of Medicine
University of Zambia
P O Box 32379
Lusaka, Zambia
+260 955 796739
em_munalula@yahoo.com

Heidi Singer
Communications and Media Relations Specialist
Faculty of Medicine
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
+1-416-978-5811
Heidi.Singer@utoronto.ca