



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
FACULTY OF MEDICINE



The DSP Kenya Project

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### **Kenyan Rehabilitation 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, health advocates in Kenya, 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.

“Many adults and children living with HIV in Kenya are now able to access life-saving treatment, so new responses are needed for long-term HIV management,” said Mr. Carilus Okidi, member of the international project team and director of the Disability Service Program of Southern Nyanza - Opapo, Kenya. “Rehabilitation can help people reach their goals as they live their lives with HIV, but rehabilitation is not yet a common part of HIV care in Kenya.”

HIV can cause disease in every part of the body. This is because it targets the immune system, rendering one’s body to be predisposed to other infectious diseases like pneumonia, tuberculosis, atelectasis among others. 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, facial palsy and nerve damage in legs. These problems require rehabilitation to help people walk, swallow, live independently, and support themselves and their families. Hence, rehabilitation promotes the quality of life within the society from all dimensions.

The medications that allow people to live with HIV can cause problems to the heart, lungs, kidney, bones and liver. For example, people living long-term on HIV medications can experience bone death in their hip bones and knees bones. 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 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, growing numbers of the 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, which also includes Eliakim Konje Moses and Florence Omoroh Arach of the Kenya Medical Training College-Homa Bay Campus are working to strengthen rehabilitation in the context of HIV across the region.

“Integrating rehabilitation into HIV clinical care and health policy is the next crucial step for our response to the pandemic in Africa,” said Dr. Esther Munalula Nkandu, senior lecturer at the University of Zambia and Africa Regional Representative for the World Confederation for Physical Therapy.

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 ([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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