

The Pan African Acupuncture Project

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As the whole world is now aware, the AIDS epidemic in Africa is a humanitarian disaster of monumental proportions. The statistics are staggering. According to UNAIDS, at the end of 2000, 25.3 million adults and children were living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. Two-and-a-half million died in 2000; another 3.8 million became newly infected. Nearly nine percent of adults in sub-Saharan Africa have the HIV virus. Although UNAIDS predicts that these numbers will in fact start to fall, they state that this will not be primarily due to reduced infection rates, but because so many of those infected eight to 10 years ago are now getting sick and will soon die from AIDS.

Adults who are sick are unable to be productive. Teachers cannot teach; those who have jobs no longer work; and farmers are too ill to plant and harvest food.

Solutions have to be addressed over multiple fronts, including the prevention of infections; treatment of opportunistic infections; providing palliative care; and support for devastated families, communities and nations. Today, in the face of a lack of medication and a strong desire to address HIV/AIDS from as many angles as possible, there has been increasing interest in the role of less expensive, effective interventions that can be carried out on a local level.

In 1990, in Boston, Massachusetts, I was among a small group of concerned acupuncturists who wanted to help those infected with HIV to achieve optimum health. This concern developed into the AIDS Care Project. What started as a volunteer effort in a dusty office space grew into an enormously successful acupuncture clinic, which has provided tens of thousands of acupuncture treatments to people living with HIV. Preliminary results from pilot studies have shown that those treated with acupuncture live longer; have less pain; fewer gastrointestinal problems; less opportunistic infections (from which they are more likely to recover with fewer complications); greater and longer-lasting ability to function; and a significant increase in quality of life.

As a response to the horrific situation in Africa, and as one of the original founders of the AIDS Care Project, I started the Pan African Acupuncture Project in Spring 2001. Since then, a team of acupuncturists, educators, public health specialists and information technologists has come together to develop an acupuncture training program specifically for healthcare providers in Africa. The complete training program will take six months; however, due to our focused, protocol-based system, trainees will be able to provide effective treatments to those with HIV after only two weeks. A group of doctors led by Dr. Margaret Muganwa, chair of the Society of Women and AIDS in Africa (SWAA), has agreed to collaborate with us to begin the first training program in Kampala, Uganda.

Until now, our investments in developing this project have been the freely donated time, energy and personal resources of the highly trained professionals that make up our group. Funds from philanthropic and government sources are urgently being sought to pay for the modest expenses - consisting primarily of round-trip airfares to Africa for U.S.-based acupuncturists - that would be needed to actualize this program. While we fully expect to receive help, obtaining funding is typically not a speedy process, and work must continue as monies are being secured.

We have now progressed to the point where two members of the U.S.-based team must travel to Uganda to meet our Ugandan counterparts face-to-face. Dr. Muganwa is preparing for our visit. During this trip, the foundations of the project will be laid; collaboration will be cemented; trainee acupuncturists will be selected; training and clinical areas will be defined; and operational issues will be identified and addressed.

We look to you to help us make this project a reality. All donations are fully tax-deductible (please see the donation information at the end of this article). With your generous support, and the implementation of the Pan African Acupuncture Project, many hundreds of individuals afflicted by HIV/AIDS will be able to receive treatments that will vastly improve the quality of their lives.

Editor's note: Donations (checks, money orders and/or acupuncture supplies) can be sent to:

The Pan African Acupuncture Project
113 Summit Avenue
Brookline, MA 02446-2319

Donations should be made out to The Pan African Acupuncture Project/ACP. For more information, visit www.panafricanacupuncture.org.

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