

MEDIA RELEASE

International Day of Persons with Disabilities 3 December, 2010

The Day aims to promote a better understanding of disability issues with a focus on the rights of persons with disabilities and the gains that may be made from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of the political, social, economic and cultural life within their communities

Around 650 million people, or 10% of the world's population, have a disability and for example, the World Bank has suggested that every minute more than 30 women are seriously injured or disabled during labour and that those 15-50 million women generally go unnoticed.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that:
"Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (Article 1)

Whilst pharmacists may have colleagues and, at the professional interface, will deal with patients with the full range of disabilities it may be pertinent to focus on the fact that this day of recognition for the disabled follows hard on the heels of World AIDS Day (Dec 1st). The Convention does not explicitly refer to HIV or AIDS in the definition of disability. However, States are required to recognise that those living with HIV/AIDS may have, or may develop, impairments which result in stigma, discrimination or other barriers to their participation, and they can fall under the protection of the Convention.

Although people with disabilities are found within the populations at higher risk of exposure to HIV, not much attention has been paid in the past to the relationship between HIV and disability. Persons with disabilities experience all of the risk factors associated with HIV, and are often at increased risk because of poverty, severely limited access to education and health care, lack of information and resources, lack of legal protection, increased risk of violence and rape, vulnerability to substance abuse, and stigma. While there is a growing recognition of the inter relationships between disability and HIV, people with disabilities still lack access to HIV prevention information, treatment, care and support services.

A document (Policy Brief on HIV and Disability) produced by UNAIDS working with WHO and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was published recently. This gives recommendations for governments, civil society and the UN, for a range of challenges currently in the response to AIDS and disabilities.

These challenges include:

- Persons with disabilities are not included in most HIV policies/processes
- Some policies exist on HIV and disability and there is mention in national strategies, but implementation is weak and often does not go beyond project level
- Strategies and programmes fail to adequately address how disability affects men and women differently
- Training for health and other professionals is insufficient
- Data are weak or totally absent (prevalence, incidence, programme needs/coverage) and research is insufficient. Existing research is not being translated into programmes/action.

Those with roles in the care of those with HIV/AIDS or who desire to update their knowledge in respect of the current activities for those with disabilities may find relevant information in the sources shown below.

www.heard.org.za/african-leadership/disability/

www.un.org/disabilities

<http://data.unaids.org>

For further information contact:
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