

HIV/AIDS

and the WEB

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When asked to do an article on HIV/AIDS-related web sites, I thought that it would be such a simple exercise. I logged onto my trusty search engine, www.google.com, typed in the keyword AIDS and was promptly confronted with a possible 41 300 000 sites! I realised that I would have to be a lot more specific if this article was going to be of any use to readers.

Perhaps the best way to tackle this subject is to find the answer to a particular question. So I started by making a list of questions that I felt most people would like answered. Let's have a look at what I discovered.

What is HIV/AIDS and how can I contract it?

www.healthzone.co.za - This site provides an easy to understand, very basic, explanation of HIV/AIDS; how it is contracted; testing for antibodies; treatment and living with HIV.

For more comprehensive, but still easy to follow information, try the www.aidsmeds.com web site. Click on the *Lessons* link and you will find a really user-friendly series of lessons dealing with various aspects of the disease. I found the information on blood tests, T-cells and viral loads, particularly interesting.

Choose the *AIDS* link on the www.healthy.net sites and you will also find information on the signs and symptoms of having been exposed to HIV.

For those concerned about the risk of

HIV-infection through sport, follow the links at www.afroaidsinfo.org - click on *More about HIV/AIDS* under *HIV affects us all*.

Where can one be tested for the HIV virus?

The AIDS Helpline has Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) sites listed for all the provinces. Access this information by going to www.aidshelpline.org.za, click on the *HIV testing* link and then on the *South Africa VCT Site list*. Most of these centres also provide counselling.

Available treatment, types of drugs and side effects

Once again the www.aidsmeds.com site provided really useful information, including a section on the side effects of anti-HIV drugs.

The www.healthy.net AIDS link also has information on alternative treatments. The emphasis seems to be on boosting the immune system in order to fight off opportunistic diseases.

Another useful site I located is www.critpath.org. Select the *Critical Path AIDS Projec* link, then *HIV/AIDS Treatment & Research Activism* link. There are various links to treatment and the drugs being used and their side effects.

What is antiretroviral treatment?

The Treatment Action Campaign has a web site, www.tac.org.za, which traces its campaign to have antiretroviral drugs made freely available to all South Africans.

To read about antiretroviral treatment, go to www.avert.org. Select the link to *Infection, Testing & Treatment* and then click

on *Introduction to HIV and AIDS Treatment*. The four main groups of anti-HIV drugs are described.

What role does good nutrition play in staying healthy?

One can find many articles on the subject of nutrition and HIV by going to www.thebody.com. Choose the *Quality of life* link and then *Diet and nutrition*.

I'm beginning to feel that I cannot survive without www.aidsmeds.com. This user-friendly site has lots of tips and information on keeping healthy and boosting the immune system.

Other sites, which I found useful are: www.hivpositive.com and www.hivdent.org. Both these sites have information on nutrition.

Where can one find information about community/home-based care?

I found an interesting article on community home-based care, as well as an article which caregivers might find useful to manage the stress related with the task of caring for HIV-infected persons, at www.afroaidsinfo.org. Click on the *HIV and you* link, then click on *Caring for the ill* under the section *HIV and you: HIV affects us all*.

What support groups and organisations are there?

There are many organisations which provide counselling and care for those affected by and infected with HIV/AIDS. Listed below are some of many.

The telephone number for the AIDS Helpline, where counsellors are available to

assist callers, can be obtained by accessing their web site at www.aids helpline.org.za. The site also has links to other useful web sites. AIDS Link South Africa, www.aidslink.org.za, has a Complete Care Centre in Hillbrow and offers care and support services in Cape Town. They have also implemented a food parcel programme. Funding for these projects is raised by Thandanani Crafts, which makes and sells beaded goods, wire goods and greeting cards, and through Discard, that turns throw-away items into quality goods which are then sold for funds.

Help Age International is a global network of not-for-profit organisations with its mission to improve the lives of disadvantaged older people. On their web site, www.helpage.org, there are articles dealing with the problem of older people having to care for AIDS orphans, a situation which is becoming more and more prevalent.

HIVSA is a NGO providing social support for the mothers and children attending the Perinatal HIV Research Unit, Soweto. Access their web site at www.hivsa.co.za, to see the various programmes and projects they have organised. Although this organisation is based in Gauteng, its holistic approach is one that others might be interested in copying.

Hope Worldwide, an American charity, is registered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Their target area is prevention through education and they run projects in various towns, including Johannesburg, Umtata and Cape Town. You can read about this organisation and the work they do at www.hopeww.org - enter *South African Program* in the Search box to find articles relating to South Africa.

Another international organisation, which provides support in South Africa, is SOS-Kinderdorf International. There are seven SOS Children's Villages in South Africa. The communities surrounding the villages are assisted through awareness and counselling programmes. Read about this organisation at www.sosvillages.org.za.

What about web sites or projects specifically geared towards teenagers?

Teenagers might find www.africaalive.org interesting. There is an article on how they can help in the fight against HIV/AIDS. There are also links to various other sites,

including www.talkingwithkids.org, where parents can get tips on how to discuss the subject of sex and HIV/AIDS with their kids.

A site which teenagers could find really useful is www.tscnow.com. Select *Resources* and then *Useful links*. You will find links to a variety of topics such as puberty, sexual health, relationships and even depression. This site also has a chat room, which is intended for teenagers up to the age of 19.

Do you recall the *Love Life* programmes on SABC television? Well, there is a web site, www.lovelife.org.za, where teenagers can get information on HIV/AIDS; getting tested for HIV and treatment, et cetera.

www.positive.org has a database of FAQs, (frequently asked questions), which make it easy to find information. They also have a BBS, (bulletin board), where teenagers can post questions and have them answered. Before joining the BBS be sure to read the rules and regulations.

Sometimes teenagers don't want to ask their parents for information pertaining to sex and STDs, or they might just want to chat to another teenager about something that is bothering them. They can access the chat room on the web site, www.13km.com. As with the BBS, please make sure to read the chat rooms' rules.

What can I do in the fight against HIV/AIDS?

HIV/AIDS is such a huge threat, that one feels that there is little the individual can do to fight this monster. However, this is not the case.

Who would have thought that a 12-year-old boy, addressing the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban, would get people to sit up and take notice. Nkosi Johnson did just that. Read about this courageous young activist at www.nkosi.iafrica.com.

Another activist regularly in the news is Zackie Achmat, head of the Treatment Action Campaign. *Time* magazine featured him as one of the 'Heroes of 2003'. To read this article and many other articles, use www.google.com and type in *Zackie Achmat* in the search field.

There are also the unsung heroes, who take it upon themselves to make a difference. Check out the www.redribbon.co.za web site. This is a really useful web site, with links to the AIDS Legal Network.

If you are thinking of fostering a child with

HIV/AIDS, you might find the following web sites interesting:

www.paralegaladvice.org.za - click on *Search* and use the keyword *fostering*. This gives a legal perspective on the fostering of a child.

www.hopeforaids.org - click on *Countries* and select *South Africa*. Read about the Mseleni Foster Care Project.

www.cotlands.org - click on the *How you can help* link.

There are so many organisations directly involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS and one thing became very clear on my journey - they all need support in one way or another. Whether one can give of one's time as a volunteer, contribute monthly or donate much-needed items, everyone and everything is received with gratitude.

What about the future?

The search for a cure for HIV/AIDS has been a long and difficult road. Now it seems that medical research is looking at finding a vaccine to protect the population against the virus. Check out www.whatudo.org for more on the development of a vaccine.

Search the Medical Research Council of South Africa's web site, www.mrc.ac.za, for articles on the research into developing an anti-HIV vaccine.

For information on the South African AIDS Vaccine Initiative, access their site at www.saavi.org.za. Read about the research by the University of Cape Town and the University of Stellenbosch in this field.

I have just scratched the surface of web sites - there are millions more out there. Use your own favourite search engine and see what information you can find. I hope that you find surfing these web sites as interesting and informative as I did.



AIDS HELPLINE
 ☎ 0800-012-322
 DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH