

Speech given by

Dr. William P. Cadwallader

3 November 2006

Ft. Lee, NJ

**Fundamental Challenges for International Community Development:
Empowerment and Education of Women, Maternal Health, HIV/AIDS.**

Voluntary Counseling and Testing of Pregnant Women and High School Seniors in Nigeria

There are 40 million people infected on Earth with HIV/AIDS. One million of these people are in the USA. In some places the 30% of the people between 15 to 45 years of age are infected. Some claim that the infection rate has increased to even 50% in certain places. In South Africa employers face the loss of 30% of their employees yearly because of death from AIDS. Funerals have become so numerous that employers have been forced to make the ruling that employees may not leave for funerals except on the weekends because it took too much time from their work.

In 2001, when then RI President Frank Devlyn asked me to travel to Capetown, SA to organize a seminar for Population Concerns I arrived after Frank and he told me that no one wanted to speak about child spacing. They all wanted to talk about HIV/AIDS. There population was disappearing before their very eyes because of this dreaded disease.

Many people want to blame HIV/AIDS on poverty. I believe that there is nothing further from the truth. HIV can, and does, infect people of every level of economic strata. The only correlation between HIV/AIDS and poverty is that whether you are rich or poor, when you are infected, the cost of treatment and ones inability to work will make all infected individuals die with no money.

The disease of HIV/AIDS was first discovered in 1973. It was not until 1987 that the first drug to combat AIDS was discovered. That was AZT. Since 1987, 22 drugs have been discovered that will help prolong the lives of infected people, but there is one important thing to always remember. No matter how many drugs we have available, no matter how good your medical care, if you are infected with HIV, you will die of AIDS. All any medicine can do is to prolong ones life.

All people infected with HIV/AIDS will die of the disease sooner or later.

The HIV virus can mutate 300 times per year. This nearly ensures that the virus will out smart every vaccine and every conceived drug. No matter how helpful initially, the drug will eventually loose its effectiveness. According to the Wall Street Journal, there are approximately 40,000 infected patients in the USA who are considered “non-responders”. This means that they have tried every conceivable combination of the 22 drugs available and no combination of these drugs will any longer work to control the disease. 20,000 of these patients are in dire need of a new drug to try in combination with another, or they will soon die.

So here we are in the country of the world where more is done for AIDS patients than any other place on earth. We have Western Blot tests for accurate diagnosis, CD4 counts for

assessing the health of the immune lymphocytes and PCRs to count the number of virus particles; and still, we cannot stop HIV patients from dying of AIDS.

It is safe to say that if we exert all of our efforts to simply treating AIDS patients and caring for the AIDS orphans we will simply have more and more AIDS patients to treat and more orphans to parent.

To be successful in the prevention of this disease one must look closer and closer to the point of transmission of the virus. One must identify those who are infected so the infected can become treated and so they can know that they MUST ACT IN A SEXUALLY RESPONSIBLE MANNER.

Today we spend billions of dollars on drugs to treat the infected and we do not look to discover who is infected so that they can be helped to have a longer and more productive life. We fret that people spread HIV in an irresponsible manner and yet we do not help those infected to become identified so they can be socially responsible citizens.

It gives me great pride to know that now the CDC has publicly stated that every blood test on individuals between the ages of 15 to 65 should in the USA be automatically tested for HIV/AIDS. If we truly want to reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS governments must test large numbers of people in groups so that individuals do not think they are being isolated from others in the society. If everyone within a group is tested then all can feel that it for the good of the whole.

Groups that can easily be tested are all members of the military. It is said that South Africa loses more of its soldiers to AIDS than they do from all military maneuvers.

All prisoners should be tested. It is not reasonable that a prisoner should be placed in a cell not knowing if his cell mate is infected with HIV and he could be bitten or raped by his cellmate simply in an effort to spread the disease.

All patients entering a hospital should be tested for HIV. It is not responsible on the part of society that an orthopedic surgeon should not know if his patient is infected with HIV when he does the surgery. If any of you had done as much orthopedic surgery as I have done you would know that it is nearly impossible to finish such surgery without having a hole in ones surgical gloves from some piece of bone cutting through the sterile barrier and scratching ones hands. It is for this reason that there ARE FEWER YOUNG PEOPLE WANTING TO GO INTO THE FIELD OF ORTHOPEDIC SURGERY FOR FEAR OF BEING INFECTED WITH HIV/AIDS.

All pregnant women should be tested for HIV. Not only can we save the infected mother from dying so early from the disease, which allows her to care for her baby, the baby too will be able to be saved so that, if we are to care for an orphan, the orphan we care for will not also die of HIV/AIDS. HIV infection of new born infants in North America and Western Europe has been eradicated by providing this service to pregnant mothers.

During a recent visit to Southern Nigeria to investigate the procedures for testing pregnant women for HIV the tribal chief who was my host said, "Do you see that school over there? It was named for my mother. What you really should be doing to have a significant impact on the spread of HIV/AIDS is to test every high school senior in that school, as a part of their high

school health class. These kids think they are invincible at this age and they are not careful. Even though the ministers require that they be tested for HIV before they will marry the couple, the young people feel the ministers are just trying to stop them from having fun.”

The chief later told me that when they tested a sizable number of people in the village they also tested the nurses to show that the test was not hard to do. Out of 15 nurses 13 were infected. This sent a shock wave through the village.

Americans might say how can it be that after having a course in school about HIV/AIDS they would not be careful. As North Americans we should make the comparison of our high school seniors who study the ill affects of smoking only to have the students come out side and to light up a cigarette.

People use the excuse of stigmas as the reason that wholesale testing for HIV/AIDS should not be done. Laws to with hold the identity of HIV infected people was made to protect the identity of people that were homosexuals. Homosexuals today are proud of their sexual orientation. They are marrying on TV and marching down the main streets of the USA to show their pride in their way of life. The stigma against homosexuals has been lifted while the stigma against HIV/AIDS has remained.

If there are 150 people in this room and there were 20 HIV infected individuals in the room and one infected with the Asian flu it is safe to say that no one would become infected with HIV. Nevertheless, there is a good chance that there would be many infected with the flu, from which the people could die; yet no one stigmatizes the person with the Asian Flu. Why should they stigmatize the people with HIV?

The people infected with HIV do not stigmatize themselves. We are the ones that stigmatize the HIV. It is up to us to change the stigma.

Sesame Street is now traveling to Africa to destigmatize AIDS. You have heard earlier today the speech by Kris Barker explaining their work in Population Media Center who produces serial broadcast stories that are designed to change social behavior by establishing new models for living by example characters with whom listeners can identify.

This needs to be used to change the attitudes of lower socioeconomic levels as well as university students.

HIV/AIDS is the first deadly infectious disease in which the infected have more human rights to spread the disease than the uninfected have human rights to remain free of the disease. If we treated Ebola, Saars and the Avian Flu like we treat HIV they too would be world-wide epidemics. We must give the HIV infected person the human right to know they are infected as early as possible so they can be treated as early in the process of the disease as possible. The responsibility for the spread of the virus must be placed on the shoulders of the people infected to not infect their loved ones. Employers must be given the assurance that they will have a stable work force for many years to come by extending the healthful, productive years of their workers by testing employees so that they can be properly treated at an early state for their own safety and the welfare of their families.

People may question whether Rotary can truly be effective in such a project of voluntary ounseling and testing for HIV/AIDS. I say, “We must believe in the power of Rotary.”