



News

Prof. Ruedi Lüthy at the Novartis Foundation's Symposium 2012

Zurich, 4 December 2012 – Prof. Ruedi Lüthy gave a presentation at this year's symposium of the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development on Tuesday, 4 December 2012, where he spoke about how clinical treatment and psychosocial support of HIV-positive children and young people can complement each other.

It is essential that patients suffering from HIV take their medication regularly. Even if they forget to take it only once or twice a week, there is a clear deterioration in their health and treatment failure develops over the medium term. Many HIV-positive children and young people in Zimbabwe suffer from the stigma of HIV infection, and many are beset by depression. Coupled with the lack of a structured daily routine, this reduces their motivation to take the medication regularly. Good clinical treatment is therefore only possible in combination with psychosocial support, as Prof. Lüthy highlighted in his presentation.

Treatment failure is fatal

Particularly in the case of children, treatment failure has very tragic consequences: "So now it is time to watch my child die," the mother of an HIV-positive child once said to one of Prof. Lüthy's staff. The disease was too far advanced, and the costs of alternative treatment could no longer be financed in a country like Zimbabwe. In other words, taking the medication irregularly and the resultant failure of the treatment mean certain death. "Therapy compliance in the case of young patients is essential for the positive progress and ultimately for the survival of those affected," said Prof. Lüthy.

Trust and controls save lives

The patients at Newlands Clinic are therefore very closely examined, supported and checked. The key to this is a personal, trust-based relationship with the nurse treating them. The life-saving importance of therapy compliance is stressed to the patients as an absolute must. The HIV treatment is based on the latest scientific findings, and thanks to a well-equipped laboratory, the nurses and doctors are able to identify HIV-related problems at an early stage, as well as possible side-effects of the treatment. Psychosocial support is also one of the core themes covered in internal training for the clinic's own care staff, and also at the two-week courses offered at the training centre.

An entire generation at risk

At the Symposium 2012 hosted by the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, healthcare experts from many countries gathered in Basel to assess psychosocial approaches and to debate various interventions aimed at promoting the mental health and well-being of children in Africa. UNAIDS estimates that more than 16.6 million children worldwide have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. 89% of them live in sub-Saharan Africa. These children often face material hardship, massive socio-economic disadvantages, social stigma, emotional isolation and psychological trauma. An entire generation is therefore at risk.

"In many parts of the world, but especially in East and Southern Africa, generations of children and youth are directly confronted with the presence of HIV and AIDS in their families,"

said Novartis CEO Joseph Jimenez in opening the meeting. "We want children affected by HIV/AIDS to grow up with dignity, providing them with the same things we want for our own kids – love, and the knowledge that somebody cares."

<http://www.novartisstiftung.org>



Ruedi Lüthy speaking at the Novartis Foundation Symposium on the close connection between clinical treatment and psychosocial support of young HIV patients.