

Nigerian Doctor Visits Local HIV/AIDS Clinic

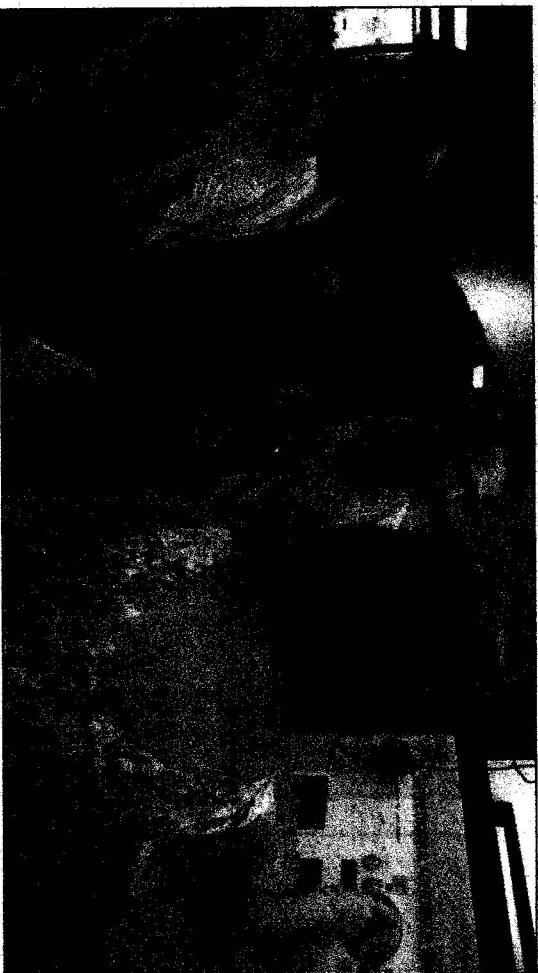
Story by Karen Flemlister

The International Foundation for Education and Self Help held their Teachers for Africa conference last week. One of the African dignitaries, Dr. Ibinabo Anita Portbeni from Nigeria took time out to visit Body Positive, a local HIV/AIDS research and resource center, located at 1144 E. McDowell Road, in Phoenix.

Body Positive has been around for 13 years. It combines social and mental health services for people who are living with the HIV virus, conducts clinical trials on clients, provides complimentary and low-cost medications and nutritional supplements, and access to a licensed behavioral health center. The purpose of Body Positive is to give a systematic response to the varied needs of those suffering with the HIV virus. Today the clinical trials that are being conducted not only have a local impact, but a national and international scope as well.

Funded by government grants, fundraising efforts, corporate and private donations, Body Positive is unique in many ways. One such example is Logan's Playground, a special child care area that allows parents that are receiving health care to drop their children off for as long as 3 hours at no cost, so they can feel comfortable that their children will be properly taken care of, in a safe environment while they concentrate on their treatments.

For parents who have to go outside the building for care from their health care providers, off site care is available as well. In the Kirk Baxter Wellness Center naturopathic physicians provide complimentary therapies such as acupuncture, weight management, and other unique therapies. Clients have access to the "Vitamin and Herb Shop" at Body Positive which allows them access to medical grade drugs with some being offered on a sliding fee scale. For prescription medications, clients receive a \$100 per month credit and if more is needed additional discounts are available. They process \$30,000 worth of medical drugs per month and two cases per month of food supplements.



Dr. Ibinabo Anita Portbeni and IIESH Vice President for Community Development Programs Dr. C.L. Mannings (far left) with Body Positive executive director Brian Helander (right) who explains how clinical trials are used to block the HIV virus.

detection it is much more likely to save the baby from becoming infected. Such pregnancies end in a C-Section to ensure the baby is born without transmission. Dr. Portbeni shared the methods of treatments that are being used in Nigeria on mothers who are about to give birth.

There are seven different support groups available to persons infected with HIV. Included in these are the women's issues groups, men of color group that deal with the stigma placed on them by the Black community, the gay men group consisting of those who have lived with the disease for at least 10 years, and the heterosexual group. They have found that because of the individual needs of various segments of the population, mixing groups impedes on active communication and that is how the separate groups evolved. Contact Body Positive at 602-307-5330 or www.phoenixbodypositive.org.

This research and resource center is earning much acclaim on the national and international scene for the clinical trials that are being conducted on their clients. Merck Pharmaceutical Company is active in providing products for clinical dosing, medication, and entry inhibitor trials. Although clinical trials cannot be conducted on women in their childbearing years, women who are not in this category and men who are very healthy with slow progression of HIV are being used in the vaccine and injection free trials currently underway.

Michelle Barker, associate executive director of Body Positive, offers educational classes on Saturdays for clients that are newly infected with HIV to teach them about the services available to them and disease management. To combat the frequent burnout and compassion fatigue experienced by staff who lose clients to complications caused by HIV/AIDS, staff meetings and retreats are held periodically.

Marge Samson, women's services coordinator, offers the P3 Peer Prevention program to focus on teens by going out to schools and other areas where youth gather and give them the education they need to make informed decisions. Many women are also exposed to the disease and she informs them of the serv-

ices designed to meet their needs. African-American and Hispanic women are disproportionately affected by HIV infections.

Dr. Andy Myers, who conducts much of the medical research on site, took time out to discuss the therapies being offered at the center. There is a push to identify more pregnant women early in their gestation. With early