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Does Pearl Omega work?

Despite controversy shrouding 'wonder drug', patients still flock Prof Obel's city clinic

By JOE OMBUOR

Despite the bashing and criticism he has drawn mostly from his professional peers since going public with his Pearl Omega discovery a year ago, Prof Arthur Obel's clinic in the heart of Nairobi continues to swarm with people of all classes seeking Aids treatment.

The researcher's clinic on the fourth floor of Commonwealth House in Moi Avenue springs to life "from as early as 5.00 am".

Why should that be the case for someone so discredited? Prof Obel contends that his wonder drug has worked wonders.

Not long ago, a University of Nairobi student went public with news that he was healing after nearly a month on Pearl Omega therapy. "Since November 18 when I started using Pearl Omega, a number of symptoms such as itching skin, lack of appetite, peeling skin and sores in my gums have disappeared," Peter Madogo was quoted testifying last December 11.

The fourth year Bachelor of Science under-graduate in the Faculty of Engineering said he tested HIV positive in July but started noticing improvement in his physical condition after consuming eight bottles of Pearl Omega.

His detractors are unlikely to give him credit but the man who has refused to succumb to overwhelming negative reactions to his pursuit in Aids research, was recently in court defending his drug against an assault by the Kenya Aids Society that had sought blocking its manufacture on the premise that it had no effect on patients. He challenged the organisation to provide the names of the patients.

Obel evinces confidence and an iron will that leaves friends, foes and acquaintances baffled about his resolve.

I was baffled to see him sweating it out even as he opened the door to his clinic. Those many locks!

"It is a deadly job I do here," muses the man whose name has become synonymous with the controversy that shrouds his fancied anti-Aids therapy.

By the time we are through with the doors, Prof Obel has reminisced on Tom Mboya's assassination at the road below us 28 years ago and briefed me of his personal security, the vendetta that has characterised his struggle against Aids and much more.

His clinic, three doors away from the cavernous reception that

has all the trappings of a medical centre, swarms with books — volumes upon volumes of mainly medical and research journals some authored by himself. At a table metres from his comfortably upholstered chair, is a bottle of Pearl Omega, a fascination to anybody seeing the wonder therapy for the first time.

"I do not treat Aids," Prof Obel's voice rings out abruptly, plucking my mind off the magic bottle, his eyes aglow behind his thick rimmed glasses. "Yes, I do not cure Aids as I have stated many times. God alone cures illnesses. I can only help reverse the advance of the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) that progresses to full blown Aids if not controlled in good time."

He peers past me, past the Pearl Omega bottle on the table as though indicating that time to talk about the drug is yet to come. Then he launches fourth on a rather educative binge. "The best way to tackle this plague of our time is to clear off ignorance from our people; to make them understand how they can ward off HIV to put the illusive virus at bay," he says.

"People ought to know that they need not panic in the unfortunate event of contracting HIV, that this is not something to make you have sleepless nights if the war against it starts in the early phase of infection."

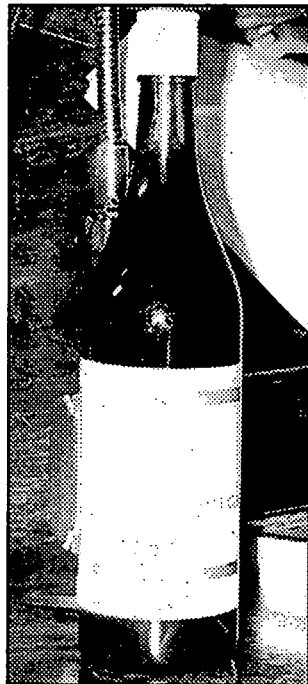
How does he control HIV? Prof Obel says the body's natural immune system relies heavily on white blood cells with protein receptor christened CD4 that are normally destroyed by the virus. Now, it is the CD4 molecule that helps mobilise the immune systems defences.

He says when the count of these vital defence cells falls below 100 per milli-litre of blood, then the victim has reached a point of no return and should only be helped to die peacefully.

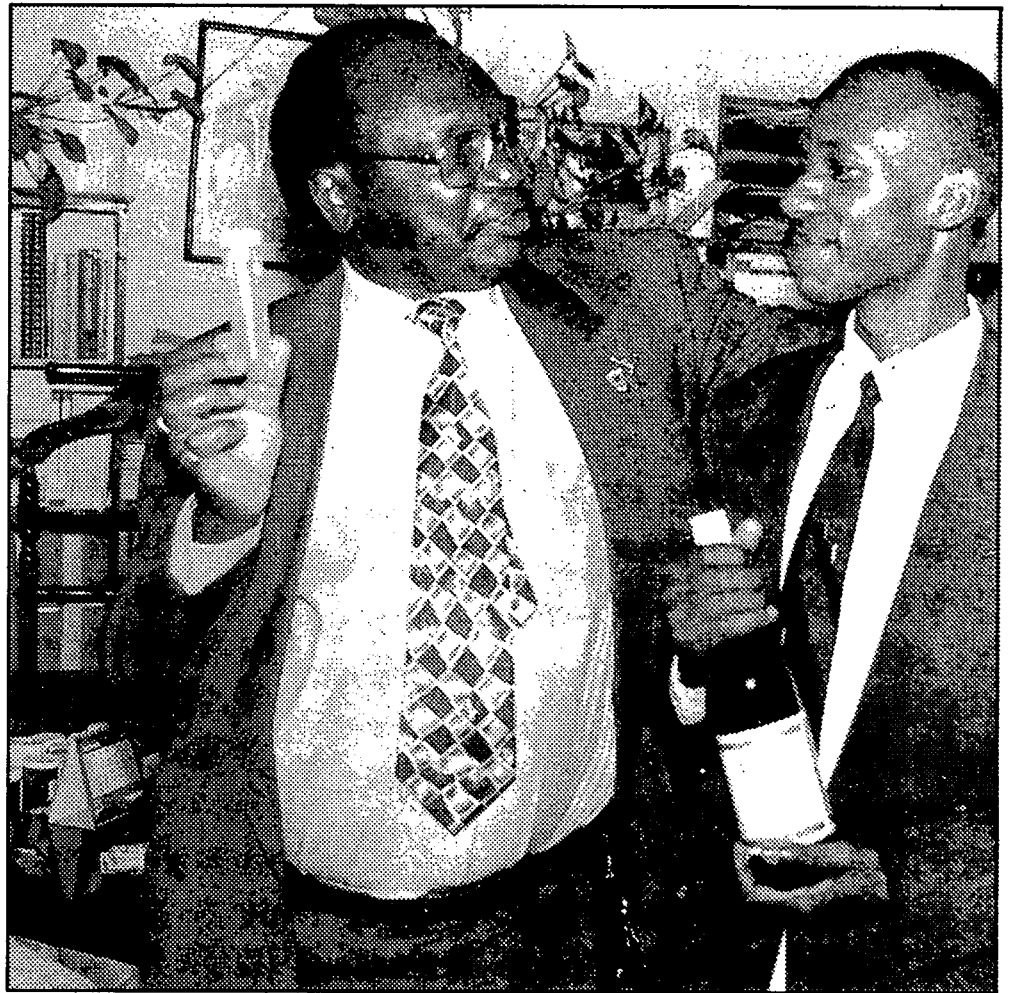
"With determination and co-operation from the patient, we strive to build CD4 count to 200 per ml of blood, but only if it had not fallen below the critical level of 100 per ml of blood," he says adding that nobody with CD4 cell count above 200 has ever developed full blown Aids.

His Pearl Omega, whose origins he traces to his grand father, has according to Prof Obel, saved countless HIV victims from developing full blown Aids since he first administered it on a patient in 1984 after safe tests on guinea pigs.

The researcher says of the pioneer patient whose identity he gives as a former Assistant Min-



The bottled Pearl Omega drug



Prof Arthur Obel with patient Peter Mudogo who claimed his physical condition had improved after consuming eight bottles of the drug.

'I do not cure Aids as I have stated many times. God alone cures illnesses. I can only help reverse the advance of the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus...'

ister: "His severe diarrhoea, swollen tummy, tremors and impaired memory were contained within three weeks of treatment with Pearl Omega. He is alive to this day."

Prof Obel, then the physician in-charge of the diabetic and endocrinology clinic at the Kenyatta National Hospital with teaching commitments at the University of Nairobi, was on sabbatical leave at the Kenya Medical Research Foundation where his name was to feature prominently with the advent of anti-Aids drug, Kemron.

He declines to discuss Kemron and its rather unpleasant fate after being touted as a Kenyan panacea for the scourge but owns up to being one of the drug's protagonists.

As for Pearl Omega, Prof Obel divulges that 40,000 Kenyans and 27,000 foreigners have been on the drug since 1984.

It is interesting how it occurred to Obel that his grand father's herb would provide a therapy against Aids. "I got fascinated with the herb long before Aids came to the scene as my grand father used it to treat people suffering from fatigue," he re-

counts, casting his mind back to his secondary school days at Friends School, Kamusinga.

"Obsessed with research even those early days and driven by curiosity to know the magic in the drug, I took a sample of the herb to the school for analysis assisted by my chemistry teacher."

He was to carry the herb to the University of Nairobi where he enrolled in 1969 for a Bachelor of Medicine degree. There, destiny landed him in the good hands of Prof Carlo Gregolini, then chairman of human biology at the newly elevated university who together with an Israeli Prof Godfrey Rumney, helped him analyse the herb until they could go no further because of lack of sophisticated equipment.

Later, while at Hebrew University in Israel for his elective term, Prof Obel was able to conduct exhaustive research on the herb, coming out with the finding that it contained neither antibiotic nor anti protozoal properties.

"So, the Aids epidemic found me with the drug. I did not stumble on it by serendipity," he says.

He pulls off his glasses and rubs his eyes. Is the interview over? No. Not before he educates us on the symptoms of Aids, I argue within myself. As though reading my mind, Prof Obel does just that.

"Most people are unaware of Aids symptoms, the simplest being a short temper. Aids sufferers are frenetic about issues that normal people would consider trivial."

"One cannot fail to notice their poor appetite. Diseases such as tuberculosis, candidiasis, pneumonia and others that are dormant in all normal people easily manifest themselves in Aids sufferers."

He says diarrhoea, boil-like swellings and skin rashes are among the most common complications.

Prof Obel is not bitter about the vendetta against him and his discovery. "It is normal to create enemies on the path to success. I have been a victim of jealousy since my college days because of my achievements."

What does he consider his greatest achievements? "Of

course Pearl Omega...and having been among the doctors who treated the late Israeli President Golda Meir while she was ill with old age during my days at Hebrew University."

The father of twin sons and a girl, Arthur Otieno Obel was born on May 21, 1946 in Ugenya location, Siaya District (then Central Nyanza District), the third born of Martin Obel and Margaret Achieng's eight children.

He was a bright child and at Kamusinga High School, was a schoolmate with Prof Philip Mbithi, later his Vice Chancellor at the University of Nairobi.

His many scholarships saw him through Jerusalem's Hebrew University where he says he picked his stoicism from the iron willed Israelis, London's Royal Medical College, and Glasgow's Royal Infirmary in Scotland. He claims to have been the first Kenyan doctor to diagnose Aids in 1983. He has published many books on the subject.

Pg 2 — What others think of Pearl Omega