

Is this a miracle Aids cure?

Questions linger over herbalist's wild claims and exorbitant charges

By WANGUI GACHIE

Has Kenyan herbalist Samuel Katiku Maingi made a breakthrough in the search for an Aids cure, or is this the greatest con in recent medical history?

Hundreds of Aids-afflicted Kenyans are flocking to the herbalist's Machakos clinic and paying as much as Sh200,000 for what they have been made to believe is the world's first fool-proof drug against this 20th Century plague that has baffled medical experts everywhere.

The herbalist, in an exclusive interview with *Lifestyle*, further claimed that he has isolated a substance that acts as a vaccine against the Aids virus, and he is charging healthy people who want to be protected against the disease Sh5,000.

He claimed that already, his hospital staff have been vaccinated. Also vaccinated were, he said, members of the police force and many other people.

"The inoculation, called *Radi* (The Kiswahili word for lightning), is derived from substances that have been struck by lightning and consequently possess the electrical properties of lightning. These properties are absorbed by the white blood cells rendering them poisonous to the HIV virus that feeds on them," he said.

"Once you have been inoculated, the vaccine protects you from the Aids virus for life," he said, although he has no clinical proof of this.

The local medical fraternity appears set for a major upheaval over Herbalist Maingi's claims. It is expected that a fresh controversy is about to erupt over the credibility of the traditional healer as a deliverer of health services to the people.

Dr Maingi claimed late last year that he had concocted a mineral-based cocktail that could cure Aids. Patients are required to pay up to Sh200,000 for the "miracle" cure.

He claims that ever since the Aids epidemic broke out, he had been working tirelessly to find a cure, and says that he succeeded last June when, "after a long, meticulous search", he found that Aids could not be cured by plant-based herbal medicine.

Dr Maingi claims that the ailment can only be cured by mineral-based preparations. He consequently set out to collect the mineral elements found in "special stones" from Kyullu Hills and several other secret locations.

The stones are ground into a fine powder and then mixed into a fine suspension. As the preparation is a mixture of stones of several different kinds, it has different colours - yellow, black, maroon, green, brown, and blue, giving rise to the name Chameleon drug.

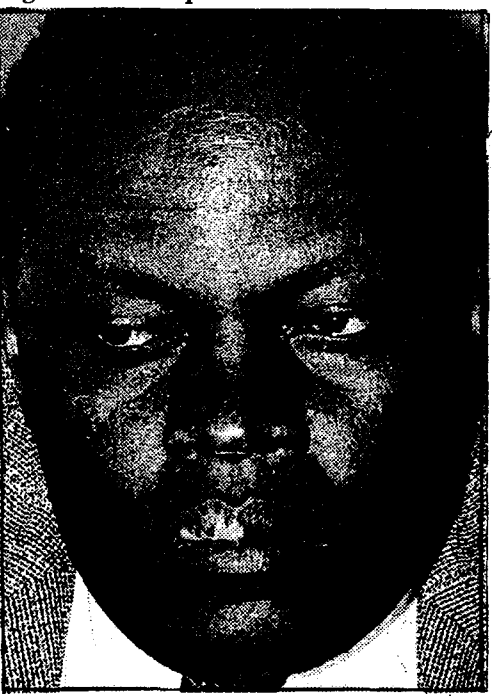
The Chameleon drug is used with the second preparation, *Radi*, to give the "full treatment" for Aids.

Dr Maingi claims that his medicine works on the simple basis of disguising the white blood cells so that they are not recognised by the Aids virus once it is in the blood stream.

"When you take the Chameleon drug, the white blood cells change colour to become purple, maroon, green, yellow, black or brown. The Aids virus in the blood attacks only the white blood cells but once they have changed colour, the virus is unable to recognise them and so they are safe," Dr Maingi said with un-nerving confidence



Mr Muriuki: "Aids sufferers should rise against such exploitation."



Dr Agata: "It is morally wrong"

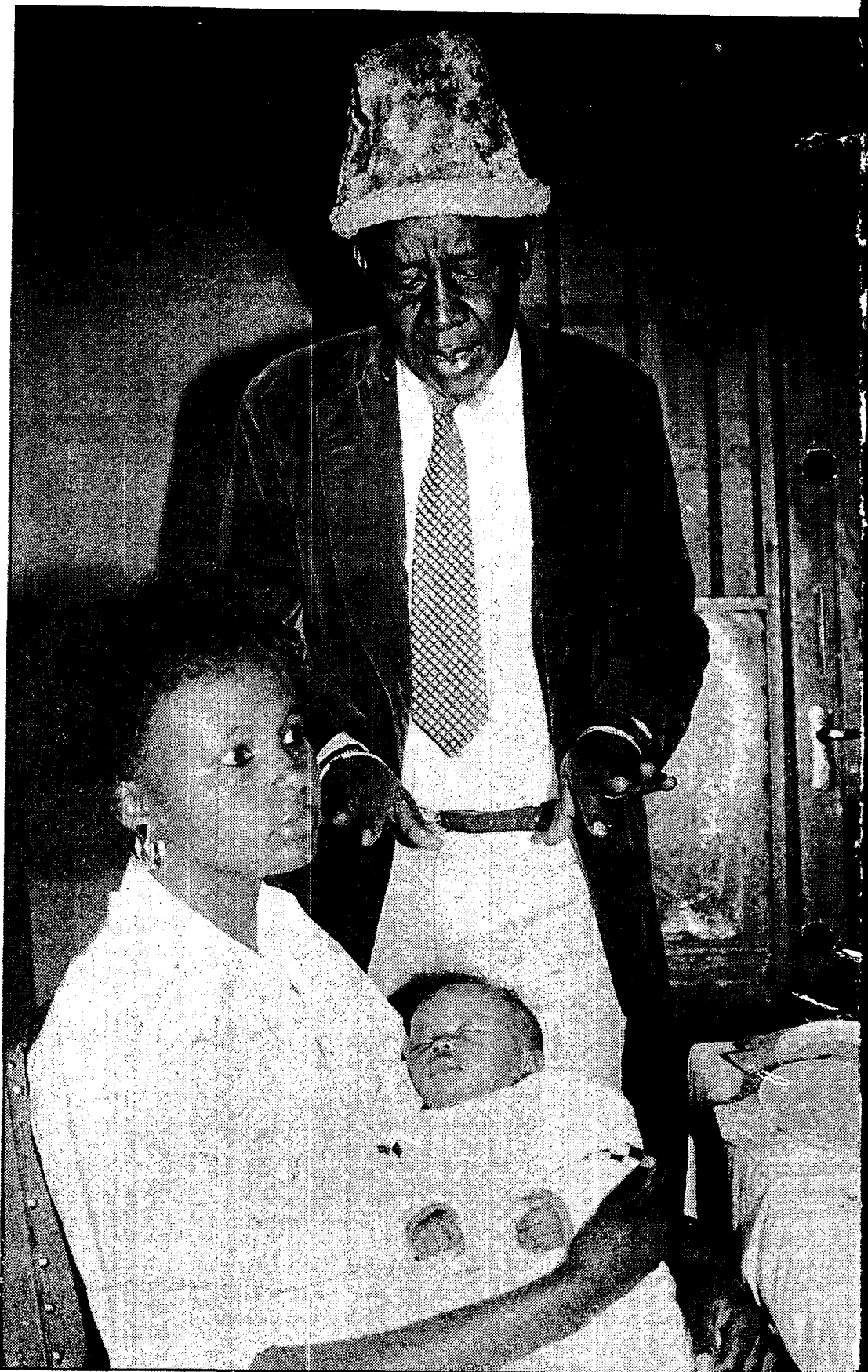
when asked to explain how the concoctions work.

For these services, which Dr Maingi says can cure Aids before it reaches its most malignant stages, one is required to pay Sh25,000 for the first consultation, and a treatment fee that can be as high as Sh200,000.

But many people are not convinced about the efficacy of the herbalist's concoction and claim this is a massive rip-off.

One patient, a 36-year-old Nairobi businessman who doesn't wish to be named, said he had approached Dr Maingi for the treatment but on being told what it would cost he left, disgusted at what he called the exploitation of HIV-Positive patients.

The man, who is now on treatment with Immunex, said he did not know the value of the treatment that is being given by Dr



Herbalist Maingi treats a patient (not an Aids victim) at his Machakos clinic: "People should be ready to pay for it even if it is half a million shillings."

Maingi but feels cheated that it should be far more expensive than the drugs he is currently on while traditional healing was always considered to be a cheaper, effective alternative to contemporary medicine.

"How can the Government allow such exploitation of the sick? If Dr Maingi has actually made a novel discovery, then he is duty-bound to make it available to more people by patenting it and marketing it world-wide instead of selling it to a select group of people in Machakos," he said.

Another woman who only recently found out she had Aids when she failed to get clearance for a life insurance policy also sought assistance from Dr Maingi after reading about him in the media.

"Dr Maingi spoke to me very convincingly about the way his medicine works. I am not a scientist and I do not understand the tech-

nical things. I was convinced that I would be cured. I was very frightened and desperate then. I did not want my friends to see me die in such an ugly and shameful way. I was ready to do anything but my husband stopped me from seeing Dr Maingi when I told him about it. We fought over it and for a long time I felt like committing suicide to show him I thought he did not understand because he was not sick himself."

"Now I have come to understand the disease better because I have been reading about it and I now know that I can never be cured. I will have to live with it till it kills me. It was all a cruel lie and I feel bitter that someone can lie to people who are sick. I am glad I did not spend money on the medicine that would not have helped me. It would just have put my family in money problems," she said.