



DIGNITAS

DIGNITAS INTERNATIONAL is a medical humanitarian organization with a singular focus: to maximize access to AIDS-related treatment and prevention through the widespread adoption of community-based care in the developing world.

AIDS is the greatest humanitarian and public health emergency the world has ever known. There are 33.2 million people living with HIV globally – 2.5 million people were infected in 2007 alone. Every day, over 6,800 people are infected with HIV and over 5,700 people die from AIDS-related illness. An AIDS vaccine is at least 10 years away. This pandemic poses an unprecedented threat to the peace and security of the world our children will inherit.

There is hope if we revolutionize the way appropriate healthcare is delivered in resource-limited settings around the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, home to 68% of all people living with HIV, just over one quarter of those in need of antiretroviral therapy have access to this life-saving treatment.

Today, the single biggest bottleneck to an effective response to the AIDS pandemic is a chronic shortage of healthcare personnel to deliver available (and now affordable) treatment and prevention.

Dignitas was created by a group of former Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF/Doctors Without Borders) health and research experts, including Dr. James Orbinski, who accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of MSF in 1999. The Dignitas team is refining an innovative model for the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS at the community level that could help turn the tide against this pandemic.

Community-based care increases access to essential HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support by leveraging a huge untapped resource – people already responding to AIDS in their own communities.

These people are drawing water, collecting food and firewood, and nursing those too ill to care for themselves. The Dignitas model harnesses their energy and empowers community members and healthcare workers with tools and training so that they themselves can provide many of the essential services that make up an effective HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention program. By organizing, training and linking these individuals, Dignitas is enabling people to participate in a continuum of care that will allow their families and communities to survive AIDS. The linking of these informal and formal networks also increases and expands the capacity of weakened healthcare structures in the developing world.

In essence, we are collaborating with people at all levels of society to build the capacity of public healthcare systems, starting with individuals in their own villages.

Dignitas believes that a community-based care model is the only viable and cost-effective way to maximize access to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention.



DIGNITAS

Dignitas is currently working with national and local governments in Malawi, sub-Saharan Africa, to coordinate and implement HIV/AIDS programming in Zomba District, where Dignitas established its pilot project in 2004. In Malawi, HIV prevalence among adults is 14%. The healthcare system is virtually non-existent, with approximately 150 doctors in the public healthcare system to care for a population of 12 million.

In just over three years, Dignitas has developed a community-based healthcare model that has provided life-extending antiretroviral therapy to thousands of children and adults, with hundreds more gaining access to medications and vital care each month.

The community-based approach is cost-effective because it is organic; it grows out of the cultural specifics of place and the existing strengths of the local people. Our model is sustainable because it is based on the natural human response in a community for people to look after one another.

The pilot project in Malawi is on budget, on target and it is delivering astonishing results. Working with research teams from the University of Toronto and the B.C. Centre for Excellence, we are at the 'proof of concept' stage, collecting data to demonstrate that community-based care is a viable healthcare delivery approach.

With good data in hand, our intervention model can be rolled out and replicated throughout the developing world. The global public health system needs these methodologies. The community-based approach to HIV/AIDS healthcare will empower governments and communities around the world to contain and control the spread of HIV.

DONATE! GET INVOLVED!
dignitasinternational.org