

Poster presentation

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## Family support unit improves care and support to HIV-infected children and their caregivers in Cameroon

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### Background

The number of children infected with HIV continues to grow in Cameroon. HIV sero-prevalence among hospitalized children at the Limbe General Hospital (LGH) has increased from 20% in 1992 to 30% in 2000. We describe our experience in providing care and support to HIV infected children and their caregivers.

### Methods

In 1992 we established a family support unit (FSU) in the Department of Pediatrics and Child Health at the LGH with following objectives: To provide HIV voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) to the caregivers and to improve care and support through health education, training nutritional and psychosocial support.

### Results

It was initially difficult for the affected clients to join the FSU due to low awareness of HIV/AIDS and high stigma attached to it. However over the years we have established a multi disciplinary HIV care and support team, which includes pediatricians, clinical officers, nurses, counselors, nutritionists and medical social workers. The team has trained the followed health care providers. It has re-organized TB and malnutrition followed up clinics, which have many HIV infected children. Guidelines are developed in the prevention of opportunistic infections. Effort is made to involved both the parents in the care of their children. Total number of clients counseled has increased from 349 in 1999 to 1.614 in 2004. Post-test clubs to the caregivers and various recreational and educational activ-

ities to HIV infected and affected children have assisted in improving care and support.

### Conclusion

The activities of FSU should be expanded to the primary health care centers, districts and regional hospitals. Caregivers and the government should plan to provide antiretroviral drugs to the needy children and their parents recruited at the FSU.