

A visit to the clinic

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It was a Tuesday morning in October 2013 when I told myself to wake early so that I could beat the queue at the clinic. I managed to get to the clinic just past seven. I joined the queue, got to the reception and opened a file. I was not feeling well that day and I had a rash on my left arm.

When I got to the sister's room before she assisted me she asked if I knew my HIV status. I said no. So she encouraged me to go and test, and as a young woman I felt it was not wise to not know my status, and so I decided to go and test. The sister sent me to the HIV testing room. When I got there I found a lady wearing a grey skirt and pink shirt with black spots. She was seated on a red long chair and she told me to wait outside. I waited with mixed feelings of confusion, fear, excitement, plus curiosity about what I was going to discover. It was the first time I was actually going to test.

I was seated in the corridor on a black chair with steel legs. The chair was very cold and the corridor was dark and quiet because I was the only one testing at the time. All I could hear was the sound of the nurses 3 quarter shoes. After waiting for something like one hour 30 minutes the nurse finally came back and called me into the office.

I went inside, frightened and expecting pre-test counselling. I looked around those grey walls with pictures of healthy food, of women and men. I could smell that horrible smell of medications. With her big eyes the nurse was busy paging through her book. Then with a loud and scary voice she asked me 'Why do you want to test?'. Before I could answer she threw another question at me.

'Are you sleeping around?' Because of my fear I just looked at her. She continued 'You are too young to be worried about your HIV status'. After saying that she asked me to stretch out my hand, and she took something that looked like an injection and pinched my pointing finger. She then told me to wait.

After a short while she gave me a look and I looked back not sure what was happening. She said 'Is there anything else I can do for you?' With a low voice I said 'I am just here to do a HIV test'. She shouted back at me 'We are done. You are HIV negative. You can go if there is nothing else'. I could hardly stand. She had not explained anything to me. Feeling so hurt I stood up with difficulty and left the office.

Out in that corridor I walked slowly, pulling my legs, making a shuffling noise with my shoes. I started to ask myself if I should go back to the nurse or if I should leave. My mind told me to leave. I got to reception. There were a lot of people seated there but I could hardly see them. I was deep in thought and felt lost. I could not understand what had just happened to me. With all the myths about HIV and AIDS I had expected pre-test counselling, and that the nurse would explain to me how I can be safe from HIV infection. But she did not say anything. Rather she was harsh and rude as if she could not wait to get me out of her office. That's the part that broke my heart.

My thoughts were running all over the place. Why did the nurse not explain things to me? Was the testing not so important? This was my first HIV test and I thought the nurse was going to give me her full attention since I was doing something great.

As I got out of the clinic door I began to walk faster. I looked at the beautiful green grass being cut by a man in a blue work suit. I began to feel inspired as I smelt the grass. The smell was beautiful and it was something I enjoyed that day.