

WORTHY CAUSE...



THE Third Order Society of St Francis in Lesotho officially handed over six Braille machines and six packs of Braille paper to St Catherine's High School Centre for the Blind. The generous donation, made possible through financial assistance from the Monaco Department of International Cooperation, aims to enhance the educational resources available for the school's 22 visually impaired students. The event was attended by school officials, representatives from the Third Order Society of St Francis, and members of the local community. The Braille machines and paper will provide the students with essential tools to improve their literacy skills and foster greater independence in their studies. During the ceremony, a representative from the Third Order Society expressed gratitude for the partnership with the Monaco Department of International Cooperation and emphasized the importance of supporting visually impaired students.

"HAVE you heard the news? A witch was captured at the Morapeli homestead, found naked in the early morning. This dark magic is spiraling out of control in our village," Taelo remarked with a frown.

He was the village's gossip king, renowned for his remarkable talent for exaggeration. If you wanted the latest scandal, just buy him a beer, and you'd get your money's worth. He sat with Leronti by the kraal, talking for the past 20 minutes, his eyes glued to the beer Leronti was holding. Today, he wasn't getting a drop—especially after he had spread Leronti's HIV status throughout the village.

"Want to know what real magic is?" Leronti asked, grinning like a cat that just caught a mouse.

"What?" Taelo still couldn't tear his eyes away from the beer.

Leronti took a long sip and burped, "The real magic is that I've been living with HIV for five years, and both my wives are HIV negative."

He looked at Taelo, waiting for a reaction. He got one—shock that quickly turned into a grin.

"If you were sharing that beer, you wouldn't be spouting this nonsense. Look at you now, drunk and rambling. Let me help you out," he said, reaching out his hand. Leronti brushed it away.

"Well," Leronti shrugged, "If you weren't too busy gossiping, you'd know that sticking to your ART (antiretroviral therapy) until you achieve viral suppression means you can't transmit HIV to your partner."

He added with a hint of arrogance, "Now

A radical method to keep your partner HIV free



I've been thinking



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that's real magic."

Taelo burst into laughter, "You can't fool me or anyone else with that nonsense."

Fools often label the sane as foolish. Taelo is truly the fool of the century. Though, to his credit, our governments and HIV campaigners haven't done enough to spread the word of U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable), a groundbreaking HIV prevention strategy endorsed by UNAIDS, the World Health Organisation, and the International AIDS Society.

To summarize briefly: The HPTN 052 study confirmed in 2011 that individuals on HIV treatment who adhere to their medication consistently and achieve viral suppression do not transmit the virus to their sexual partners. Several other studies throughout the globe replicated the 2011 findings – that when people living with HIV are virally suppressed, there is zero risk of sexual transmission. Even those with detectable but suppressed virus (equal to or less than 1 000 copies/ml) who take medication as prescribed have negligible risk. Viral load levels are measured by viral load tests at 6 and 12 months after starting ART and then every 12

months thereafter.

Importantly, viral suppression is the ultimate goal of ART as it improves the health of the person living with HIV by staving off opportunistic infections that define advanced HIV disease. It also reduces the risk of HIV transmission to the fetus during pregnancy.

"U=U" signifies that HIV treatment serves as a method of HIV prevention, often referred to as Treatment as Prevention (TasP). This understanding has potential to significantly reduce the stigma surrounding HIV-positive individuals engaging in sexual relations. People living with HIV may no longer be seen as vectors of disease, and finally able to enjoy anxiety-free sex lives. However, in many

countries, including Lesotho, the vast majority still do not know about this revolutionary HIV prevention breakthrough.

Admittedly, embracing U=U is a significant shift from traditional safer sex practices, such as condom use. Indeed, it's a radical notion that individuals — on successful HIV treatment — can engage in sexual relations without condoms or other HIV prevention interventions. It's important that Health Ministries support HIV programmes to communicate the prevention benefits of ART to all people living with HIV. They must also strengthen adherence counselling during ART initiation and throughout treatment to ensure viral suppression.

And now more than ever — against a backdrop of US funding cuts — Lesotho must ensure HIV treatment continues. Reduction in HIV treatment leads to viral rebounds, soaring HIV transmission rates and even death.

It is essential for everyone to understand that treatment is vital for health and longevity; it is also a proven method of HIV prevention and provides peace of mind.

This message is especially for all Taelos out there. This is genuine magic (based in science!)—the true Gospel of Good News.

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