

WEST AFRICA AIDS FOUNDATION & INTERNATIONAL HEALTH CARE CENTRE

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Strengthening the HIV Response in Western North: A High-Level Visit from the Ghana AIDS Commission

On Monday, April 7, 2025, the Sefwi Wiawso District office of WAAF in the Western North Region welcomed a high-profile delegation from the Ghana AIDS Commission (GAC). The delegation was led by the Director General of GAC. He was accompanied by senior members of the commission in the name of Mr. Charles Oduro (Deputy Director of Finance), Mr. Fred Nana Opoku (Technical Director), Mr. Dramani Yakubu (Technical Coordinator, Western Region), and Madam Josephine (Executive Assistant). During the visit a broad coalition of stakeholders, such as Midack Charity Foundation, Equip Health Ghana, the Ghana Health Service (GHS), the Regional Coordinating Council, and various civil society organizations (CSOs) working in the region gathered together to welcome the delegation of GAC and to participate in the meeting. This joint meeting was a step towards enhancing regional collaboration with various stakeholders in the national fight against HIV and AIDS and sought to evaluate progress towards achieving national HIV goals by strengthening regional partnerships.



In his keynote address, the Director General underscored the urgency of working together to overcome persistent challenges in HIV prevention, care, and treatment, especially in underserved communities. He emphasized the importance of regional commitment, sustainable resource mobilization, intensified public education, and the use of data to guide interventions. Stakeholders used the opportunity to voice key challenges hampering their efforts, including limited funding, logistical gaps, stigma and discrimination, and weak coordination among service providers.



The visit ended with a renewed spirit of collaboration and a shared commitment towards achieving objectives of the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan. The momentum generated promised to inject fresh energy into the HIV response across the Western North Region.

Family Support or Not

On the 11th March, 2025 at the International Healthcare center a special educational session was held with clients attending the clinic. It was led by Mad. Patience, a nurse from the clinic. The topic discussed was: coping with unsupportive relatives and strengthening support systems. Participants were mothers living with HIV and their babies. Nurse Patience warmly welcomed participants, acknowledging the emotional and psychological toll that comes with living with HIV, especially when family members are unsupportive. She emphasized that while family support is important, it is possible to build strength and find support elsewhere. The goal of the meeting was to explore practical ways to cope with unsupportive relatives and create a nurturing support system.

Mad. Patience addressed the pain caused by unsupportive relatives or those who criticize choices, or show indifference. She indicated that while the lack of support can be heartbreaking, it should not define a person's worth or future. Participants were encouraged to seek out positive, reliable support systems beyond their immediate families. These could include trusted friends, understanding community members, or healthcare providers who offer emotional and practical support. Mad. Patience also highlighted the power of connecting with peers living with HIV. Peer groups can provide a judgement-free space to share experiences, exchange coping strategies and foster a sense of belonging. Key themes arising from the discussions included overcoming stigma by self- acceptance and recognizing self-worth. Help from family and support systems such as NGOs can provide good counseling, financial aid, and health education. Mad. Patience stated that good nutrition, regular exercise, adherence to therapy and staying well informed about treatment can empower individuals as well as their partners, family members or allies and can make a significant difference in their lives.



Empowering Mothers, Nurturing Babies: Healthy Mother = Healthy Baby

On April 8, 2025, the IHCC hosted yet another impactful session under the Healthy Mother = Healthy Baby project. This project is dear to us at WAAF-IHCC because, we believe: when a mother thrives, her baby flourishes. The session was held under the theme “What Doctors Might Not Tell You After Birth & Infant Nutrition; Tips Every Mother Should Know.” The session brought together postnatal mothers and their little ones for a heartfelt and enlightening discussion. Facilitated by Miss Kara, and supported by our clinic team and interns, the session delved into the often-unspoken challenges of life after childbirth. During the session mothers shared their personal experiences in relation to health personnel, spouses and families after the childbirth.



During the session mothers shared their personal experiences in relation to health personnel, spouses and families after the childbirth. They were carefully guided through important issues like postnatal anxiety, postpartum depression, and the need of seeking timely help. Timed with Global Child Nutrition Month, the session also offered practical, relatable guidance on child feeding

practices, especially in the first critical months and years of a child's development. From exclusive breastfeeding and the introduction of complementary foods, to tips on creating “rainbow meals” using locally grown foodstuff like sweet potatoes, plantain, beans, groundnut, garden eggs and various fruits. The advice was both well understood and empowering.

Mothers also learned feeding schedules for different age groups, and how to avoid common pitfalls like introducing water too early, which could reduce breast milk intake and lead to malnutrition.

The interactive session ended with a vibrant Q&A, as mothers raised concerns about adding sugar or salt to baby's food, and using breast milk in creative ways when formula isn't affordable. The session ended with sharing of food items and thoughtful reflections from participants—many leaving with new insights and renewed confidence in their motherhood journey.



Mental Illness in Mothers and Pregnant Women



Mental illness in pregnant women and postpartum mothers are often referred to as perinatal or maternal mental health disorders. These disorders include a range of conditions that can occur during pregnancy and up to two years after childbirth. Mental illness is a significant public health concern due to its sensitive nature which leads to stigma, isolation, broken relationship and negatively affect maternal and child well-being as a whole.

On the 13th of May, a special session focusing on the critical issues of mental health among mothers and pregnant women living with HIV was held at the WAAF clinic, IHCC. The main purpose of this meeting, was to educate mothers on how mental illness can occur during pregnancy and after childbirth and how to deal with it.

Present at the session were nine mothers with their babies and one pregnant woman. The session addressed the causes and effect of depression during antenatal and postnatal stages. She highlighted the importance of early detection, seeking help and breaking the stigma surrounding maternal mental health.

During the session, mothers were encouraged to openly share their emotional challenges based on their experience. Practical advice during discussions and deliberation on various coping strategies, self-care practices and when to seek professional support such as counselling and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) were the main points during the session.



WAAF HIV Prevention Lecture at the University of Ghana



On June 23, 2025, the West Africa AIDS Foundation (WAAF) was invited by the university of Ghana, Legon School of Social Work to deliver a lecture on the prevention of HIV infection. The session was held at the Kofi Abrefa Busia Hall within the Department of Social Work and was facilitated by Dr. Paul Sowah, WAAF's Deputy Executive Director.

Dr. Sowah engaged the students in an informative and interactive session that covered various aspects of HIV, including how HIV infection occurs, methods of prevention and the available treatment options in Ghana. Emphases were placed on prevention strategies such as testing and counseling, safe sexual practices and the prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT). The lecture was both educational and practical. Students were taught how to properly examine condoms for defects such as holes, tears or leaks before use.



Condoms were distributed to students as part of the practical awareness initiative. The class was very lively and interactive, with students asking insightful questions to deepen their understanding of HIV prevention and management. Before the session was brought to a close, WAAF extended its gratitude to the authorities of University of Ghana for the opportunity to educate and engage with the students on such an important public health issue. This takes us a step closer to Ending AIDS.

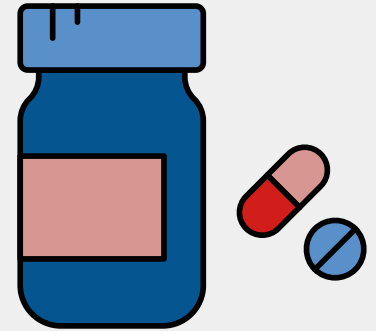


Living with HIV: Stories of Strength, Struggles, and Support

On March 28, 2025, the IHCC once again became a space of truth, encouragement, and learning as clients living with HIV gathered for a powerful interactive session themed: “High Viral Loads and the Challenge of Long-Term HIV Medication.”

The meeting brought together PLHIV clients with both high and suppressed viral loads. This was to explore the realities of staying on antiretroviral (ARV) medication for years, dangers of defaulting from treatment and the physical, emotional, and social challenges that come with it.

Clients openly shared their experience of taking daily ART medication, fear of resistance and stigma and discrimination that still plague their relationships, workplaces, and homes. “Sometimes it feels hopeless,” one participant expressed, while others shared how the medicine itself has become a lifesaver for them: bringing down viral load, restoring strength, and offering hope for a better future.



The discussion explored following issues:

1. Why adherence matters: Skipping medication—even for a day—can lead to a rise in viral load and increase vulnerability to opportunistic infections and building resistance to medications.
2. Understanding lab values of viral load: Clients were educated on the meaning of various levels of viral load: high viral load indicates high concentration of virus in the person’s body which is a danger to the immune system and predisposes person to various opportunistic infections. Therefore, a regular testing (every six months) is essential for treatment monitoring and making sure that the person receives appropriate medication.
3. Real talk on expectations: Participants shared their reason for seeking care: some came for treatment hopeful for change, others simply wanted to look “normal” again—but all agreed that medication, when taken correctly, can turn things around.
4. The mental and emotional toll: Several participants shared their experience on how they’ve battled rejection, fear, and even suicidal thoughts—often in silence due to fear of disclosure.



Auntie Alice inspired the group members by drawing from her own experience to emphasize the importance of staying consistent with treatment, trusting healthcare providers, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Questions poured in around HIV injectables, immune boosters, and how to manage disclosure to partners and loved ones.

The session ended with free CD4 testing for all participants—just one more step in equipping clients to take charge of their health. At IHCC, we know that living with HIV is not easy—but no one has to do it alone. These sessions remind us that every story matters and every step forward is a victory worth celebrating.

Write-Up on Rural Watch Project Nutrition Meeting

In May 2025, the Rural Watch Project together with the International Health Care Center (IHCC) held an educational session focused on the crucial role of nutrition in ensuring good health. The participants were all clients of IHCC. The session was led by Miss Joana Amponsah; the MCA of IHCC, who guided participants through an engaging and educational discussion on the importance of good nutrition.



Miss Amponsah began by emphasizing the importance of Nutrition in maintaining overall health and well-being. She explained how nutrition plays a role in supporting key bodily functions, enhancing immunity, aiding growth and development, and preventing diseases. She stressed on the importance of eating a well-balanced diet that incorporates various nutrients in the right proportions. A well-balanced diet supports good health and ensures that individuals live productively.

The meeting was highly informative and left attendees with a deeper understanding of how everyday food choices impact long-term health. Participants expressed appreciation for the Rural Watch Project and Miss Amponsah's commitment to promoting better health through Nutrition education.

WAAF and IHCC enjoy servicing the people of Ghana; we continue to ensure our services are available to all and that absolutely no one is left behind. We also enjoy sharing our experiences as we continue our journey in the areas of health in Ghana focusing on HIV, TB and all associated conditions. You can reach us and keep in touch with us via any of the under-listed contact details. We look forward to an exciting year in 2025 and you can follow our work on these same platforms.

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- **Sunyani** - New Dormaa Extension Pastoral Road Plot No. 188 Ethiopia Junction
- **Obuasi Municipality** Community Nyameso 044 Manganese PTH House NO. Ac-116-7735
- **Bonsu** - Beside Kpogas Furnitures- Tech Traffic Light



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