A Conversation About HIV and the Issues Black Women Face

AIDS United interviews Violet, a patient navigator at who works with women living with HIV.

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In honor of National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, marked annually on March 10, AIDS United caught up with Violet, a patient navigator at Quality Comprehensive Health Care. Violet has over seven years of experience in the human services field and has specialized training in enhanced patient navigation and working with women living with HIV. Violet's favorite quote is, "Whether you think you can or not, you're right," Henry Ford.

How did you get involved in this work?

I got involved in this work because I saw the need for women to be empowered when it came to their health. Previously working with the Department of Family and Children Service, too often I saw women who were not getting proper medical treatment for HIV.

National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is a day to raise awareness about the impact of HIV on women and show support for women living with HIV. What does that mean to you?

A day of empowerment. This is a day that is not just set aside for women and girls to learn about HIV, but a day to empower them to be an advocate for their health. In addition, a day of support for women and girls living with HIV, to let them know that no longer do they have to be silent when it comes to their health.

Why is it important for women and girls to talk about HIV? What are some ways to start the conversation?

It is important for women and girls to talk about HIV because of the old saying, "Either you are at the table or on the menu." Too often women and girls have been on the menu and not allowed to sit at the table. History has shown us that gender inequities in this country have left women out in the cold for way too long. Women in general have been disproportionately affected by HIV, especially women of color. It is now time for all women living with HIV and those who are allies of women living with HIV to rise to the occasion and let their voices be heard. No longer should women be silent when it comes to our health. Who better to speak about what is best for our (women) bodies than women? The best way to start the conversation is by building a trusting and nonjudgmental relationship.

What does it mean to meaningfully involve Black women with HIV in this work?

To meaningfully involve Black women with HIV is to educate, empower and teach Black women on how to become an advocate for their own health. It is allowing them the chance and space to fully be who they are and love the skin they're in.

How can we operationalize Meaningful Involvement of People with HIV/AIDS principles in our work?

By having open and honest conversations within our communities. In addition, Providing training programs for not just our organizations but for the community on the effects of HIV.

Black women are disproportionately affected by HIV, in terms of new diagnoses and HIV health outcomes, compared to women of other races/ethnicities. How can we address this disparity? How can we address the social and structural issues that impact Black women's health?

The first step is to be honest about the issues Black women face in this country: racism, discrimination and poverty.

For more resources about how we #StopHIVTogether this National Women & Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness day, click here.

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