

Project Ujima

Minnesota Department of Human Services HIV/AIDS Division

East Africa 101: A Curriculum for Health Care and Social Service providers working with East African Refugee Communities

In the fall of 2001, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) HIV epidemiological data indicated an increase in the number of HIV-positive Africans in Minnesota. Simultaneously, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and Hennepin County Community Health Department (CHD) began to see more HIV-positive African immigrants in their various service programs. The Two State agencies and Hennepin County, with considerable assistance from the African communities in Minnesota, mobilized to address this new challenge.

Some of the challenges are much more complex than expected due to strong stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and the lack of HIV/AIDS awareness and education in most African communities. For some HIV positive refugees, these factors may have contributed to them not receiving ongoing HIV/AIDS medical care and needed social services. Therefore, DHS HIV/AIDS Division took the initiative and developed a web-based curriculum that will help health care and social service professionals in the areas of cultural, linguistic and geo-political issues when delivering HIV/AIDS services to the targeted three main East African refugee communities of Ethiopia, Oromo, and Somalia.

The focus of this web-based curriculum is geared toward the understanding of:

- History of the targeted communities (Ethiopian, Oromo and Somali)
- Cultural norms, religion, cultural values, and sexual behaviors
- How culture dictates sensitive health issues be handled, and the stigma that people with HIV/AIDS are facing in these communities
- How the cultural aspect interfaces with health care and case management
- Useful tools for helping clients with HIV/AIDS from the targeted communities effectively receive quality health care services.

The curriculum would be a comprehensive document of Somali, Oromo, and Ethiopian communities in Minnesota with their respective cultural and religious values. The comprehensive curriculum would be an informative document for case managers on how to better serve these communities without infringing their values. The curriculum is also intended for mainstream social service agencies to understand the stigma of health and life style issues in these communities, and it will be a useful tool for helping HIV/AIDS clients or other social service clients to more effectively obtain or access health care and other social service benefits.

