



DR ANDREW OYEMWIMINA

Rural Individual Fellowship Award

Walter Sisulu University

Paediatrician, Dr Andrew Oyemwimina's original plan was to emigrate from his home town of Warri, Nigeria, to the USA to practice. After being accepted to practice medicine in South Africa, he found the education so good that he stayed.

Today, he's making a difference at the Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital, (NMAH), in Mthatha where he's just completed his research with the topic: The prevalence of HIV infection among paediatric patients admitted to NMAH in the Eastern Cape. NMAH is located in OR Tambo District and this tertiary hospital receives referrals from Mthatha and surrounding areas.

Andrew's study is the first of its kind in the Eastern Cape that looks at the prevalence of HIV infection among paediatric patients who were admitted to hospital in 2016. Similar studies have been done at King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban (2001) and at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Gauteng (2012). He says, "My research was a cross-sectional retrospective study completed between 1 July 2018 and 31 December 2018."

The ages of the 419 patients in the study population who were admitted to hospital in 2016 ranged between one month and 12 years old. Talking about the conclusion of his study, Andrew says, "The prevalence of HIV infection in the study population of 419 patients, including both HIV infected and non-infected patients, was 7.3%. The prevalence of HIV infection in the subgroup that was exposed to HIV and received prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) was 11.8%, which was above the national percentage."

"In 2016, when these patients were admitted, the prevalence of HIV infection among children exposed to HIV and who received prevention of mother-to-child transmission across provinces varied from 1.4% to 5.9% according to the 2016 National Strategic Plan. The transmission rates at NMAH was higher than that at 11.8%. This high rate compared with the national rates of 1.4% to 5.9% in 2016 will form part of another study that I plan to conduct to look at the factors responsible for the high HIV prevalence rate of 11.8%, even after patients received prevention of mother-to-child transmission."

Obstacles to PMTCT in rural settings

A lot of people in the region prefer traditional care over Western medicine, so education and awareness are important. Studies in the rural Eastern Cape have shown that socio-economic constraints, poor roads and telecommunications, and an under-developed transport system, are obstacles to accessing PMTCT services. The NMAH serves 13 clinics in the OR Tambo District of Mthatha, and most hospitals in the former Transkei region refer patients to them.

National PMTCT – a major success story

PMTCT became an official National Department of Health policy in 2010. By 2016, UNAIDS estimated that more than 95% of HIV positive pregnant South African women were receiving ARV medicine to reduce the risk of MTCT. The results were impressive. MTCT rates nation-wide fell from 3.6% to 1.5% between 2011 and 2016, achieving the 2015 target of a transmission rate below 2%. According to the SA National Aids Council, SANAC, the country is now on track to eliminate MTCT.

Andrew, is married to a computer scientist with an MBA, and they have three boys. "My wife and the boys live on the north coast of Kwa-Zulu Natal," he says. Andrew was the middle child in a family of eight raised in Warri, Nigeria. After matriculating, he moved to Benin City where he studied medicine at the University of Benin before completing his internship and community service. "I worked there for a few years but then decided I want to specialise. I initially spent several years at the Stanger Provincial Hospital in Kwa-Zulu Natal before coming to Mthatha to specialise in paediatrics." Andrew plans to specialise further in paediatric cardiology. When he gets time, he enjoys listening to R&B and watching Premiership English football.

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