

In November 2017, NEPHAK continued with the collection of signatures to petition the Ministry of Health and partners to fast-track the roll-out of Dolutegravir based HIV medication. The signatures and a statement from the PLHIV community was to be presented to the Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Health and partners on the December 1st World AIDS Day 2017. The need to collect signatures arose after it became apparent that the Health Principal Secretary who is also the Chair of the Kenya CCM to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria failed to respond to a letter sent to him by NEPHAK on the need to fast-track the roll-out of DTG to Kenya PLHIV community: <http://nephak.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/DTG-Letter-to-KCM-Chairpdf.pdf>

The letter had two specific calls: That the resources to be secured from the GFTAM under the Funding Request be spent on Dolutegravir based ARVs rather than on Nevirapine or Efavirenz regimens. And that any opportunity realized by Kenya through the re-programming of the current Funding Model grants be used to prioritize the shift to Dolutegravir grant. DTG is widely used in high-income countries and is recommended by WHO as an alternative first-line HIV and Aids treatment. In 2015, WHO recommended DTG as an alternative first-line treatment for adults and adolescents. Kenya included DTG in its HIV treatment guidelines in 2016.



**NEPHAK members at a past AGM, Nakuru County.**

Another notable event for NEPHAK in November was around the plight of the girl-child. Under the theme, ‘Power of Adolescent Girl’, there were a number of activities that were organized in different counties to deliberate on strategies that would empower the girl-child and enable them sustain their good health and well-being. NEPHAK joined hands with other stakeholders to raise awareness of the issues being faced by adolescent girls such as the sexual health risks, including HIV infection. Young girls have also been victims of gender based violence even from among relatives. The network is engaged in an advocacy to ensure adolescent girls and young women are respected, protected and healthy. The network continues to monitor, document, refer and mitigate cases of human rights abuses touching on the girl-child.



NEPHAK members in Nakuru in procession to raise awareness on the plight of girls.

NEPHAK also joined the global community to commemorate the World Mental Health Day 2017. This is because depression is very common among people living with HIV and many NEPHAK members continue to exhibit forms of mental health challenges. Globally, the mental health of HIV-positive individuals is an increasing concern. World Health Organization ART guidelines recommend that people with HIV should be screened for depression, the presence of which has been associated with poorer health outcomes, low quality of life and suboptimal adherence to ART. In Kenya, NEPHAK continues to advocate for screening of PLHIV in the status of their mental health.

NEPHAK also agrees with the fact that, “depressed PLHIV are at increased risk of developing viral resistance and other poor outcomes because of low level of ART adherence, and more specifically older patients who have even a less efficient immune system.” This is why NEPHAK continuously calls upon the Ministry of Health and partners to adopt approaches that may help PLHIV know early if they are nearing depression. For NEPHAK, the World Mental Health Day 2017 brought an opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of mental health sessions in its treatment literacy trainings and activities. It is also important to note that both depression and being HIV positive are highly stigmatized and where both exist, stigma and discrimination become really high.