

*Webinar della Federazione Internazionale CR/MR per la giornata mondiale dell'AIDS
1-12-2020*

This year we cannot celebrate World AIDS Day without talking about the new dramatic pandemic we are experiencing all over the world and which appeared 4 decades after the spread of HIV. Today we know little or nothing about COVID just as we knew little or nothing about HIV in the 1980s.

In just 40 years, humanity has managed to pass from a state of total powerlessness and desperation to a much better condition which is missing only the last decisive step, that of definitively killing the virus in the places where it hides, in the “reservoir” where antiretroviral therapies forced him to take refuge. Killing definitively the virus is a therapy within our reach, just as we managed to find drugs to completely eradicate the hepatitis C virus.

When humanity is mobilized, the results arrive.

For HIV, success came mainly thanks to the creation of the Global Fund which radically changed the prospects for fighting the virus. The political will of great leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton, Kofi Annan and Jaques Chirac together with the pressure of many civil society realities, including our RC/RC International Movement, and the unanimous effort of the pharmaceutical industries have made the miracle: The Global Fund whose motto was and is “Business not as usual” has managed in a short time to create the conditions for the discovery of better performing therapies and services and to make them available to the majority of countries at a price that goes from prohibitive to now become affordable even in the poorest countries.

This success story must inspire us so that what has happened for HIV can be repeated for the new Covid pandemic. Covid is a great challenge but can become also an opportunity.

All over the world, public health services are doing an unprecedented number of blood tests to detect covid. It would be a great help if we will succeed in advocating systematically the association with HIV and Hepatitis C test. A lot of people are not aware of their serological status and discovering a positivity will change dramatically their life expectancy.

Evidence show that new drugs to treat HIV virus are very effective, and access to quick test and to treatment is the best prevention tool we can imagine to decrease

the number of infection in a community. This is going to help us to reach UN goal and make possible the 0 infection. Unfortunately some risk behaviors are more common in certain groups like injecting drug users and man who have sex with man. Indeed the incidence of HIV infection globally has dramatically declined in the last years, but HIV infections among people who inject drugs are rising.

Viral hepatitis and tuberculosis rates among people who use drugs also are high in many parts of the world. These

preventable and treatable diseases, combined with overdose deaths that are equally preventable, are telling us that especially for people who use drugs, authorities are not doing enough to reach the same good results got in the general population.

I use to say that often stigma and discrimination kills, more than virus or more than drugs!

Creating barriers to treatment and recovery services allows demand for illicit drugs to remain high. Destigmatization of People with Drug disorders facilitates the delivery of accessible, evidence-based public health services and it is strongly connected with their fear to access to health services.

In order to reverse these trends, it is necessary to end criminalisation of drug use and drug possession for personal use and to make harm reduction programs accessible to all people who use drugs.

There is comprehensive evidence that harm reduction works and it is safe and cost-effective for the HIV prevention, and also for the prevention of viral hepatitis and opioid overdose-related mortality.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies should advocate to public authorities their strong support of harm reduction approach, including needle-syringe programs and opioid substitution treatment.

As RCRC Partnership on substance abuse, we are committed since many years in decreasing the harm for people affected by addictions. Since we are guided by the principle of Humanity, our primary objective is to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity, especially among the most marginalized, trying to leave no one behind.

These are the thoughts that inspire me on 1st December 2020