



A Mother Finds Support though USAID

Brenda, a 25-year-old mother, attended her first antenatal visit for her second pregnancy. During the group counseling, the health visitor discussed HIV/AIDS transmission from a mother to her child and ways to reduce this transmission. Brenda, who was about twelve weeks pregnant, underwent individual pre-test counseling on HIV and agreed to take the HIV test.

During her second visit, the nurse shared the HIV test results which were stamped in red on the form "HIV antibodies detected." Upon learning of her HIV test, Brenda experienced a range of emotions from disbelief to hurt. It took some time before the health workers could calm Brenda by reassuring her that she could live a healthy life with HIV.

Brenda informed her mother and siblings who responded with anguish to the news but provided the support she needed to undergo the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) program. USAID's funding of the program began in 2003 when Guyana became one of fourteen countries to benefit from the U.S. International Mother and Child HIV prevention initiative.

USAID's program is enabling women throughout the country to access HIV counseling and testing services, and if tested positive, to receive drugs to prevent newborn infections. The program also helps build stronger health care systems to reach as many women as possible. The overall goal is to support Guyana's reduction of current mother to child transmission of HIV rates by 50% by 2008, and to continue to assist the Guyanan Government in expanding and strengthening the existing effort.

Two hours before her baby's delivery, Brenda was given the short course of antiretroviral prophylaxis, and the baby was given a pediatric course of nevirapine. As a result, her baby is now HIV negative. Brenda is one of 2,783 women who received PMTCT services in 2003. Under this program, Brenda continued her antenatal care and received further counseling on infant feeding, safe sex practices, as well as family planning. Brenda also joined a support group of HIV positive mothers at the health center.

"I am not ashamed of my condition, and feel that I can use my experience to help others"

- Brenda, 25-year-old mother and PMTCT program participant

After giving birth, Brenda became an advocate and educator of the Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS. She is now permanently employed on a project being implemented by that organization. "Today I can use myself as an example to talk to other women about HIV/AIDS," said Brenda. "I am not ashamed of my condition, and feel that I can use my experience to help others." Brenda has demonstrated that HIV positive persons can make a positive contribution in the fight against HIV and AIDS.



Photo: USAID/Guyana/FHI Jewel Crosse

A healthcare professional giving a presentation at a prevention of mother to child transmission group education session.

