The Reality of Discordance

Communication Objective:
- To increase listener’s awareness of the reality of discordance

Suggested Guests:
- AIC Branch Manager
- Medical Dr/DHO

Key Content:

What is discordance?
- It is possible for one partner to be infected with HIV while the other partner is not. This is known as “discordance.”

How common is discordance?
- Discordance is common in Uganda. One out of every 20 couples living together in Uganda is HIV discordant.
- Couples can be together for a long time – months or even years – and still have different HIV statuses.

If a woman goes for ANC and finds out her HIV status, it is safe to assume that her partner’s HIV status is the same?
- Just because one partner is HIV positive does not mean the other is, too. It is also true that if one partner is HIV negative, the other may be HIV positive. You should not assume that you have the same HIV status as your partner. It is best to test together to find out.

Does a discordant relationship mean that the HIV positive partner has been unfaithful?
- In some cases, the couple enters into the relationship when they are already discordant. In other cases, it may be a result of being unfaithful.

If the couple has been having unprotected sex, and the uninfected partner hasn’t gotten the virus, does that mean he or she is safe?
• No. HIV negative partners in discordant couples are at a very high risk of infection if the couple has unprotected sex. Discordant couples should use condoms every time they have sex.

Discussion Questions:
• Are you familiar with the concept of discordance? What do you know about discordance?
The Reality of Discordance II

Communication Objective:
- To increase knowledge of how discordance is possible

Suggested Guests:
- AIC Branch Manager
- Medical Person/DHO

Key Content:
Reminder: Last week we talked about HIV discordance, where one partner is infected with HIV while the other person is not. We said that couples may remain with different HIV statuses for months or even years.

How possible is it that one partner can be infected with HIV while the other partner is not?
- There are many reasons why discordance is possible. HIV is not transmitted every single time an HIV positive person has sex with an HIV negative person. This is similar to couple's becoming pregnant. Sometimes a couple may become pregnant the first time they have sex. For other couples, it may take several years for them to be able to conceive a child. Similarly, HIV may be transmitted the first time a couple has sex or it may take years.

What factors determine whether or not HIV is transmitted?
- There are a number of factors that affect whether or not HIV is transmitted:
  - Condom use (reduces risk of HIV transmission)
  - The presence of other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (increases risk of HIV transmission)
  - The amount of virus in the body (more virus increases risk of HIV transmission)
  - Being recently infected with the virus (increases risk of HIV transmission)
  - Having cuts or small wounds in the genital area (increases risk of HIV transmission)
  - The frequency of sex (the more often you have sex, the higher the risk of HIV transmission)
How can you prevent infecting the HIV negative partner?

- There are things you can do to prevent infecting the HIV negative partner. It is like when termites invade one tree but not an adjoining tree. Once the farmer discovers that the one tree has been damaged from termites, he takes precautions and treats the adjoining tree to prevent this tree from the termites.
- Similarly, without risk reduction, the HIV negative partner remains at risk of becoming infected with HIV. Couples can choose not to have penetrative sex, and to satisfy each other in different ways, such as mutual masturbation. If a discordant couple decides to continue having sex, they should use condoms correctly every time they have sex to prevent infecting the negative partner.
- The first step is to test for HIV together and find out your HIV statuses.

Discussion Questions:

- If you found out you were in a discordant relationship, what would you do to prevent infecting the HIV negative partner?
- What challenges do you think would arise if the man was HIV positive and the woman was HIV negative?
- What challenges if the woman was HIV positive and the man was HIV negative?
The Reality of Discordance III

Communication Objective:
• To address myths and misconceptions about HIV discordance

Suggested Guests:
• AIC Branch Manager
• Medical Dr/DHO

Key Content:
Reminder: For the last 2 weeks, we have talked about HIV discordance, where one partner is infected with HIV while the other person is not. We said that couples may remain with different HIV statuses for months or even years. Many people have a hard time believing discordance is possible, and there are a lot of myths and misconceptions about HIV discordance. We are here today to address some of those myths and misconceptions.

Is it true that if one partner is HIV positive, the other partner automatically is, too? What if one partner is HIV negative, is the other partner definitely HIV negative?
• No. This is not true. Couple members can have different HIV statuses. One partner’s HIV status does not determine the other partner’s HIV status, and just because one partner is infected does not necessarily mean the other partner is, too. The only way to find out is through an HIV test.

Is it true that special blood protects some people from HIV, and that people with blood group “O” cannot get infected with HIV?
• No, this is not true. No blood group protects against HIV. Everyone is at risk of HIV infection.

Is it true that in discordance, the HIV negative partner is really infected, the virus is just hiding or taking long to show up in the blood?
• No, this is not true. It is possible for one partner to be infected with HIV while the other is not. Unless the negative partner has been exposed to the virus in the last 2-3 weeks, then the virus will be detected.
If you have different test results, does it mean the testing machines are unreliable or that the test was wrong?

- No. Three different tests are used to ensure results are accurate.

Is it true that if you have gentle/lubricated sex, you cannot transmit HIV?

- No, this is not true. Gentle/lubricated sex does not protect against HIV.

Is it true that HIV negative status is a protection from God?

- No, this is not true. The HIV negative partner can become infected at any time if you do not take risk reduction measures.

Some people believe that if you have unprotected sex once and don’t get infected, you might as well continue. Is this true?

- No. HIV is not transmitted on every exposure, but can be transmitted at any time. It is never too late to take risk reduction measures.

Discussion Questions:

- What other myths and misconceptions have you heard about discordance?