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# World AIDS Day: Doctors spread awareness and hope to patients

*AIDS IS CHRONIC BUT PATIENTS CAN LIVE AVERAGE LIFESPAN WITH TREATMENT*

By Nourhan El-Sebahy

The 27th annual World AIDS Day was on 1 December. AIDS is the acronym for acquired immune deficiency syndrome, and is caused by a virus called Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

AIDS attacks a person's immunity system and makes them much more vulnerable to infections and diseases. This case worsens as the stages of AIDS progress.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) confirmed that expanding Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) to all patients with HIV is the key to ending the epidemic within a generation.

Expansion of ART will have a positive impact on reducing deaths by AIDS.

As little as three decades ago, when AIDS was first discovered, testing positive for HIV was generally taken as a

fatal diagnosis.

Today, the perspective is much less grim. Now, if patients are diagnosed early and take antiretroviral medication as directed, doctors say they can live a normal lifespan, but there is still no complete cure.

AIDS is a disease people can live with

and adapt to. Professor of medicine at Alexandria University Sameh Sadiq told Daily News Egypt. HIV is found in the body fluids of an infected person and is transferred from one person to another through blood-to-blood or sexual contact. Infected pregnant women can transfer HIV to their embryos during pregnancy, delivery, or through breast feeding when the baby is born.

AIDS is a chronic disease that poses a fatal threat, and is caused by a virus resulting in failure or defect in a person's immunity system. The virus overrides the body's ability to fight

and resist viruses, bacteria, and fungi, as the immunity system is disrupted.

Sadiq, who is also the director of Alexandria Regional Centre for Women's Health and Development, said although the number of HIV patients in Egypt is not very large, at 5,000 patients, this number is increasing.

He stressed on the importance of awareness against the virus and disease so the general public is not suddenly surprised by the large number of patients, as was the case with the hepatitis-C epidemic, which began due to unsafe practices in Egyptian hospitals.

Mohammed Abdel Baky, an advisor to UNAIDS, told Daily News Egypt the disease is chronic and the virus is never really cured. It is very possible, however, to live a full lifespan with the disease with extended adherence to treatment.

Abdel Baky highlighted the importance of awareness of ways to prevent the spread of the virus. Ways to prevent contracting HIV include having safe sex, since it is one of the most common methods of transmission. Men who partake in numerous sexual relationships must wear a condom to reduce the chances of infection.

Another common way of spreading the virus is sharing and reusing needles. All mothers should be cautious and do complete check-up examinations before pregnancy and childbirth.

Mothers who do not receive treatment will transmit the virus to the foetus, but if the disease is diagnosed early, she can then follow a treatment programme under the supervision of a doctor and then can carry and give birth to a baby who does not get infected.

