

HOPE THERAPY

Picture yourself lying in a hospital bed. You are extremely thin and weak and even sitting up to drink water is an effort. You were diagnosed with HIV a year ago and have declined slowly over the last few months. Around you in your community there are hundreds of people affected by the virus and dying on a daily basis. You have seen the progression of the disease around you and know that it ends with death. Now you are in hospital and you think that this must surely be the end, like you have seen so many times before. There is no point in getting up, in eating, in taking the medicine as you know that you are going to die.

One day an occupational therapist comes into your room and starts to talk to you about your illness. She tells you that there is hope, you are on ARVs and that, yes, you are very sick but if you look after yourself and try to get up and get your strength back, you can be healthy and live a full life. You look at her and think, "What does she know?" You are too tired and sick to think about getting better. She explains to you that even if people are sick and in bed they can still do things



and get joy from that. She starts by putting your hands and feet into warm water and washing them with lovely soaps. Afterwards she paints your nails and puts on cream. It feels good to be clean and smelling nice, almost like you may not be sick!

As the days pass, she comes everyday bringing beads and sewing activities, cards to send greetings to your children at home. You have your hair washed and brushed. As the time passes, you start to be the one initiating the activities, asking for the things you want and getting great joy from completing a task. It feels like you are more than just a sick person, you are someone who can do things, make choices, have relationships and the will to live slowly creeps back.

Hope therapy started at Zithulele Hospital in late 2009. Megan was inspired by a presentation at a conference about the benefits of Occupational Therapy especially in clients with a low CD4 count. Hope therapy is based on the physical and emotional benefits of engaging in occupations and meaningful activities.

The program is an inpatient service, mainly in the general and TB wards. It is aimed to restore hope and dignity to those who are extremely ill (especially with HIV/AIDS, but not exclusively) or who are long-stay patients. Recently however it has evolved to also have a palliative aspect where patients who are terminally ill have a comfortable and pleasant time in their last days.

If you'd like to donate to this programme, please visit the Jabulani Rural Health Foundation website for more details.

Picture: A woman who was admitted for several months wearing an apron and some of the beaded items that she made.