



VIDEO

Breaking the Silence: Stories from AIDS Activists in Southern Africa

Produced by Making WAVES Productions (156 Glebe Ave., Ottawa ON K1S 2C5) in collaboration with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), 1996. To be broadcast on TVOntario Apr. 1, 1997, midnight. Sale (\$100) and rental (\$40) copies of the video are available, across Canada, from IDERA Films at 200-2678 W Broadway, Vancouver BC; tel. 604 732-1496; fax 604 738-8400; idera@web.net; website <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/idera>.

Overall rating:	Good
Strengths:	Relevant topic; illustrative footage of prevention activities; insightful interviews and narration
Weaknesses:	Strongly optimistic bias
Audience:	Viewers wanting to understand how most of the people with HIV and AIDS in the world live and how one prevention program operates in this context

In the cities of southern Africa, HIV seroprevalence rates among pregnant women are up to 35%.¹ One of the programs that tries to address the epidemic is the Southern African AIDS Training Project, which is funded by the Canadian Public Health Association. *Breaking the Silence* explores the grassroots AIDS-related activities conducted by this project. The primary focus is on women, as a group vulnerable to HIV infection, and on the struggles and successes of HIV/AIDS peer-education and prevention efforts in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The video helps the audience see life in southern Africa through the eyes of women. HIV education is conducted in the urban shanty compounds through songs, dances and role plays performed by female peer educators. Interviews with many women demonstrate their vulnerabil-

ity to HIV infection, given their cultural setting and lack of power. Their burden as caregivers for those dying of AIDS is also illustrated.

The video does not illustrate how HIV exacerbates life's hardships in this resource-poor setting.^{2,3} Perhaps this omission protects both the African women and the audience, but it also represents a lost opportunity to gain better insight into the true suffering of the 13 million Africans with HIV and AIDS.⁴ There is also a strong bias toward describing successes in HIV education and prevention at the expense of illustrating why the epidemic in southern Africa continues to grow. Even in prevention efforts, there is great frustration because of the difficulty in achieving cultural and behavioural change, especially for women, who are an oppressed group.⁴ Reducing the number of superficial interviews with anonymous people and providing in-depth interviews with articulate African women could have provided more insight in this area.

By describing a single HIV/AIDS prevention program in southern Africa, this video is an interesting introduction for uninitiated viewers. However, the audience may be left with an overly optimistic view of the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic in southern Africa. With this caveat in mind, the video is strongly recommended to audiences who want to help "break the silence" and to understand how most of the world's people with HIV and AIDS live.

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References

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2. Needham DM. The reality of despair: AIDS in Malawi. *Can Med Assoc J* 1996; 155:91-2.
3. Needham DM. Visit to Zambia offers

humbling reminder of privileges Canadians enjoy. *Can Med Assoc J* 1996;155:579-80.

4. Baggaley R, Sulwe J, Kelly M, Ndovi Macmillan M, Godfrey-Faussett P. HIV counsellors' knowledge, attitudes and vulnerabilities to HIV in Lusaka, Zambia, 1994. *AIDS Care* 1996;8:166.

Canadian Medical Association New Guide to Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs

2nd ed. Edited by Mark S. Berner and Gerald N. Rotenberg. 576 pp. Illust. Reader's Digest Association Ltd., Montreal. 1996. Distributed by the Canadian Medical Association, Ottawa. \$39.95 (\$33.95 CMA members). ISBN 0-88850-515-9

Overall rating:	Good
Strengths:	Good organization and comprehensive treatment of information
Weaknesses:	Cluttered appearance; lack of colour; typographic errors
Audience:	Public

This is the second and revised edition of a book intended to provide information to the public about the drugs they take. The organization of the 2 editions is identical, but the current version includes several drugs introduced since the first edition was published in 1990. There are also revised monographs on some of the drugs, such as fluoxetine. The appearance of the pages in section 4 ("A-Z of drugs") is improved and less cluttered in the second edition.

The book is organized into 7 parts. An introduction provides a guide to using the book. This is followed by sections entitled "Understanding and using drugs," "Drug finder index," "Major drug groups," "A-Z of drugs" and a glossary and index. The final section is a drug-poisoning and emergency guide.

Plentiful line drawings are used to provide information about the action of drugs and the diseases they are intended to treat. The figures are infor-

mative but would have benefited from use of colour. The "Drug finder index," for example, has brilliant colour reproductions of available capsules and tablets to allow readers to identify them. Similar use of colour would have clarified the information conveyed by the illustrations.

Symbols or icons are used in section 4 to indicate the routes of administration and the precautions associated with each drug. The symbols are generally useful, but I could find no key to or explanation of those used to indicate routes of administration.

There were also occasional typographic errors. For example, in the "Drug finder index," Fiorinal was spelled Florinal.

Overall, this is an updated version of a useful book.

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Timely Death: Considering Our Last Rights

Anne Mullens. 372 pp. Alfred A. Knopf Canada, Toronto; Random House of Canada, Ltd., Mississauga, Ont. 1996. \$31. ISBN 0-394-28084-9

Overall rating: Excellent

Strengths: Clear presentation and good use of narratives

Weaknesses: None

Audience: Public

The twin issues of euthanasia and assisted suicide continue to trouble the public, health care professionals and policy-makers in various corners of the world. Anne Mullens has done Canadians a service by writing this book. An excellent introduction to this subject, her book is both