

BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT SICKLE CELL DISEASE

NIGERIA IS THE COUNTRY WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH SICKLE CELL IN THE WHOLE WORLD.

Sickle Cell Anaemia is an inherited condition that is associated with severe shortage of blood, **unspeakable pain, stroke in children, untimely death, untold sorrow as well as social stigma for patients and their families.**

Important points about sickle cell anaemia:

- Sickle cell anaemia is an inherited disorder
- Nigeria has the highest number of sickle cell cases in the world
- Over 150,000 babies are born each year with sickle cell anaemia in Nigeria
- Over 40 million Nigerians are carriers of the sickle cell gene
- Average life expectancy in Nigeria is very low - less than 20 years; whereas in the US, it is now over 60 years

A number of things happen in a person with sickle cell:

- In a person with sickle cell, the blood is not able to efficiently carry oxygen (which is vital to life), to all parts of the body
- In people with sickle cell, the cells that carry oxygen in their blood are shaped like a sickle (hence the name Sickle cell) or like the letter C, rather than being disc-shaped; the cells therefore cannot flow freely through the blood vessels; they usually get stuck on the walls of the vessels and cause blockage
- In people with sickle cell, their blood cells break down rapidly causing shortage of blood or what we call anaemia
- People with sickle cell usually experience severe bone pain (said to be one of the most severe pain humans can suffer - some say worse than labour pain or tooth ache)
- **Sickle cell patients tend to suffer extensive leg ulcers or sores that often fail to heal even after skin grafting. The ulcers cause them much debilitation and social isolation and rejection**
- Young people with sickle cell can suffer strokes - which could be fatal or which could leave them paralysed for life
- People with sickle cell may suffer a breakdown of their hip bones and end up in wheel chairs if they do not have hip replacement surgery
- sickle cell patients tend to suffer extensive leg ulcers or sores that cause them much debilitation and social isolation
- Socially, they suffer stigma and discrimination