



Personal Statement of Nazarius Celsus Dorus

Living with HIV is a long-term condition. Small changes here and there make all the difference, yet when it comes to medication, one can't do much apart from what one is given.

Hi, my name is Nazarius Celsus Dorus and I have been living with HIV since 3 September 2004, the fateful day that I was diagnosed. When I found out, I was numb and had no knowledge on HIV or AIDS. All I knew was that I have the virus in my body and it is multiplying. In Malaysia during that time, the medication was not free. Luckily my CD4 count was high enough that I did not require it. But I had to open my big mouth to a colleague and she told everyone at work. I was out of a job straight away.

Four years later, my CD4 count dropped to 248 and I had to start my medication – and thank God first-line HIV treatment was already free in Malaysia by that time. I was given Stavudine, 3TC and Nevirapine and also Dapsone. Two weeks later, the doctor advises me to take SLN – a combination of the three, minus Dapsone. Lo and behold, I had rashes showing up all over my body. I am allergic to the medication. The doctor then asked me to stop taking my medication for 10 days.

Ten days later, I was given a new regime of efavirenz (Stocrin or Sustiva), Stavudine and Lamivudine. It was a great combination, as I did not experience any side effects at all. None of the efavirenz side effects, either. But in less than a year, my viral load shot up to 12k+ even though I have never missed nor taken my dosage late.

The doctor said that I had virological failure. The counselor came to me and we started talking. She informed me that I had to begin second-line treatment, namely, Kaletra. And what's more, I have to pay RM950¹ per month! As someone who just started working to have to fork out 4/5 of my salary just to pay for medication, it was such a shock. Why is it so expensive???? It is not a new medication, as some people have been on it for years. It's a good thing that the other two meds I am on, ddl and lamivudine, are free, or else I would be in the red every month.

I have had to tighten my belt because Kaletra is so expensive for me. I wish the drug company would lower the price, as I know that the number of people taking Kaletra is growing higher and higher – and there are many more who can't afford the treatment they need.

¹ - \$309 USD as of May 9 according to <http://www.xe.com>