

### The Face of AIDS

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**A**madou ushers the next patient into the stuffy consultation room and my heart catches in my throat as I watch her enter. She does not have a festering wound in need of antibiotics and clean coverings. She is not pregnant and she is not returning for her third caesarean section. She does not suffer from an obstetric fistula that can be surgically repaired. Her wasted limbs, excavated temples, and extreme fatigue tell a different and far more ominous tale. Her sister helps her onto the examining table, both women turn to us with blank expressions devoid of hope, and we are told an all too common story.

This patient's name is Haoua, a widow and mother of three living children. Her two eldest have been taken from her by her deceased husband's family. Haoua's sister has noticed that she has been getting progressively weaker over the last two years, and she is unable to work for a full strenuous day in the family millet fields during the brief rainy season. After a quick physical exam, we cannot make a definite diagnosis. We do not test for HIV and even if we did, we do

not have any anti-retrovirals to offer. Haoua will never know for sure what is causing her to fade away, but it will not be very long before her children lose their mother.

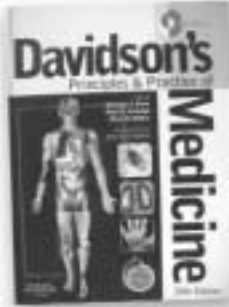
I was only in Burkina Faso for a few short months, but several times a week I met people like Haoua. There were also many children brought by adults who were not their parents as both had died. This is the inexorable truth of AIDS in communities where anti-retrovirals (ARVs) are virtually unknown. How do you tell someone that they are going to die within months, when life-saving treatment exists in other parts of the world? As Dr. Paul Farmer asks: "If access to health care is considered a human right, who is considered human enough to have that right?"<sup>1</sup>

We have the grave and immediate responsibility to allow Haoua, and others like her, justice and hope in the face of AIDS.

#### References

1. Farmer P. Pathologies of Power. Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd; 2005.


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