

Embracing Albinism: International Albinism Awareness Day

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND PROMOTING INCLUSION.



Today, as we observe International Albinism Awareness Day under the theme “10 years of IAAD: A decade of collective progress,” we acknowledge and advocate for the rights of individuals with albinism globally. People with disabilities face numerous challenges, and this year's theme urges us to debunk myths, challenge misconceptions, and combat discrimination against individuals living with albinism to foster a more inclusive society.

Background

The term albinism originates from the word, albus (Latin for white). Albinism is caused by pathogenic variants in genes important for melanin synthesis. It is a genetically heterogeneous disorder characterised by hypopigmentation of the eyes, skin, and hair. Albinism can be classified according to clinical phenotype and genotype, and the two main categories are oculocutaneous albinism (OCA) and ocular albinism (OA).

Prognosis

Individuals with albinism have a normal lifespan but they can present with several signs and symptoms including the following: skin cancer, reduced visual acuity, photophobia, refractive errors, congenital nystagmus, hypopigmentation, and iris transillumination defects.

Provisions for individuals with albinism

The provisions for individuals with albinism focus on genetic counselling, getting proper eye care by regular visiting the ophthalmologist and a specialist in skin care called a dermatologist for sunscreen lotion prescription.

At JF Kapnek Zimbabwe, we proudly continue to play a significant role as a key partner in supporting children with disabilities through support from Liliane Foundation using Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) strategy in partnership with 23 Partner Organisations in Zimbabwe. Our commitment to empowering and assisting individuals with albinism and other disabilities aligns with the goal of creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Albinism is a genetic condition that affects people of all races and regions, but individuals with albinism in Africa often face unique challenges due to prevalent myths and misconceptions surrounding the condition. Here are some common myths and the corresponding truths:

Myth: People with albinism have supernatural powers.

Truth: Albinism is a genetic condition that affects the production of melanin in the skin, hair, and eyes. People with albinism do not possess any supernatural powers.

Myth: Albinism is a curse or a punishment from the gods.

Truth: Albinism is a genetic condition that is inherited when both parents carry the gene for albinism. It is not a curse or a punishment.

Myth: People with albinism are not capable of leading normal lives.

Truth: People with albinism can lead normal, fulfilling lives with the right support and resources. They can go to school, work, and participate in society just like anyone else.

Myth: People with albinism are inferior or less intelligent.

Truth: Albinism has no impact on a person's intelligence or abilities. People with albinism have the same range of intelligence and talents as anyone else.

Myth: Albinism can be cured through witchcraft or traditional medicine.

Truth: Albinism is a genetic condition that cannot be cured through witchcraft or traditional medicine. Seeking such treatments can be dangerous and ineffective.

It is important to educate communities about albinism, promote acceptance and inclusion of individuals with albinism, and advocate for their rights and protection. By dispelling these myths and promoting accurate information, we can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for people with albinism in Africa and beyond.

