

## Hajj 2009

*Excerpt from the diary of Khaiser Khan, NPL's Muslim Support Worker, during the Hajj in 2009.*

It was on the 4 day of Dul Hijah when I realised that my health was being affected and subsequently ended up with a chronic chest infection. It wasn't long after that that I had to be rushed into hospital.

When I finally came around, I was being attended to by a medical professional. He enquired about my profession back in London. He appeared very surprised by what I related and seemed shocked to acknowledge that there were Muslims living with HIV in the UK. He further enquired about how these Muslim find themselves infected with the virus. He was further shocked to acknowledge that the majority of my clients were gay.

He related that during his 10 years of practising medicine in Saud Arabia, he has come across countless incidents of testing patients and then having to declare their status to the Health Ministry. He related that this was a very difficult area of his job, as he knows that if found to be reckless in their practises, the patient is inevitably deported from the country without treatment and care.

For the majority of cases involving Emirate nationals, the Health Ministry would offer minimum treatment without continuing care. He also related that in these cases the person would not be able to enter into marriage in accordance to the country's law. All nationals have to undergo routine screening before entering into a marriage agreement. It is during this routine that men may find themselves testing positive for HIV or sexually transmitted infections. They would be given treatment without counselling and promotion of safer sex, leaving them vulnerable to further infection and diseases.

I then wondered about the 3 million pilgrims flocked into the holy city and just how many of them are living with HIV and with guilt, shame and stigma, as they are not seen as equals amongst their own people.