



# HIV/AIDS AND TB NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER FROM THE NATIONAL HIV/AIDS AND TB PROGRAMME, PRETORIA

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

For contributions, please submit contributions and suggestions to [serenc@health.gov.za](mailto:serenc@health.gov.za).

## SOUTH AFRICAN AIDS VACCINE INITIATIVE

The South African AIDS Vaccine Initiative (SAAVI) was established in late 1999 to “develop and test an effective, affordable and locally relevant vaccine for South Africa within ten years”. After almost two years of activity SAAVI continues to progress extremely well, with all funded groups showing excellent progress.

Eight research groups with many Principal Investigators are functioning in the following core areas:

- A) making of novel vaccines
- B) testing sites for human clinical trials
- C) immunology laboratories
- D) ethics groups
- E) animal facilities for animal models of HIV infection
- F) community mobilization and lobbying; media and legal

### ***SAAVI recognition***

SAAVI has been seen internationally during 2001 as an excellent model of how a national Vaccine Initiative

should be established and run. The combination of Government and private sector commitment and funding with excellent science and international collaboration is being used as a model for other countries. It has allowed SAAVI to leverage an immense amount from local and international donor sources.

### **Key activities / outcomes in 2001**

- Preparation for the first clinical trial with the VEE vaccine ongoing (for start in early 2002). This has been expanded from one site to two sites.
- SAAVI investigator (Dr. C Williamson) awarded the “World Technology Forum” award for biotechnology in London (July 2001) for her VEE vaccine work.
- Nine potential HIV vaccine types being researched and developed by SAAVI, and another four internationally in collaboration with SAAVI scientists.
- Four of these internal SAAVI vaccines are being fast-tracked so as to start human clinical trials within 24 months. (This is extremely fast by international standards).
- Commitments with international vaccine manufacturing partners in place for in 2002.
- Significant numbers of patents granted for HIV vaccine products.
- Expansion of clinical trials sites in SA to accommodate new products.



- Extensive community involvement and mobilization at trial sites.
- Dr Tim Tucker appointed as Director of SAAVI in June 2001.
- Establishment of a primate research facility infrastructure for SAAVI.
- Dedicated funding for a second immunology laboratory for the primate immunology.
- SAAVI conference held in Cape Town in May 2001.
- SAAVI members have been active participants in the African AIDS Vaccine Program and the International AIDS Vaccine Program.
- Significant capacity development amongst researchers.

### **Finances**

The finances of the South African AIDS Vaccine Initiative continue to be in a healthy state, due to the continued commitment of both the South African Government (through the Departments of Health and Arts, Culture, Science and Technology) and Eskom.

### **Conclusion**

SAAVI continues to grow internally, as well as internationally through research excellence in the area of HIV vaccine development and testing. Although the scientists and clinicians are aware of the enormous tasks ahead, SAAVI is well on track to produce a viable HIV vaccine product for South Africa within ten years, as initially set out.

People with disabilities are a marginalized group of people, and as such, they are very vulnerable within the context of HIV/AIDS.

Of particular concern, is the lack of visibility of disabled persons in programme planning and information dissemination in relation to HIV/AIDS within South Africa. This omission has resulted in the fact that many people with disabilities have very little knowledge, if any, on the issues relating to HIV/AIDS with the disastrous consequences that society and disabled people themselves believe that their disability makes them immune to HIV/AIDS.

The South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), initiated by government, has undertaken a multi-sectoral approach to the situation of HIV/AIDS. Hendrietta Bogopane represents the disability sector within SANAC. In November 2000 SANAC and the disability sector (through the South African Federal Council on Disability), held its first national summit on HIV/AIDS. During this summit, the disability sector highlighted their specific concerns in relation to HIV/AIDS.

Whilst the national summit provided an insight into the extent of this vulnerability, it was noted that at provincial and community level, disabled people were often unaware of the consequences of HIV/AIDS, and unskilled within the face of such an added adversity.

One of the major outcomes and realisations was the need for more awareness raising of HIV/AIDS within the disability sector. Specifically the need for training and sector mobilisation as well as the need for capacity building and skills development in relation to counselling was identified. It was noted that these



programmes should be disability specific and user-friendly to deal more effectively with peer support and counselling relating to HIV/AIDS.

The POLICY Project – in collaboration with the Department of Health and funded by USAID - developed a series of workshops in partnership with the South African Federal Council on Disabilities and Hendrietta Bogopane. The workshops were designed to address the specific needs of those living with a disability and had the following objectives:

- To provide participants with basic knowledge about HIV/AIDS
- To explore with participants how HIV/AIDS impacts on their lives as disabled people
- To enhance the participation of disabled people to address the issue of HIV/AIDS, in order for them to identify and prioritise the HIV/AIDS issues which are relevant to their community at a provincial level
- To equip participants with the skills to be HIV/AIDS advocates within the sector
- To create an understanding of the HIV/AIDS and STD Strategic Plan for South Africa (2000-2005), which will form the framework for the provincial HIV/AIDS work plans.

By the end of October 2001 representatives in all of the nine provinces will have participated in the workshop process. A follow up Disability Summit will be held on 21 and 22 November 2001 in order to assess the progress made in the disability sector around HIV/AIDS over the last year.

There have been a number of lessons learnt through undertaking the responsibility of ensuring that disabled persons are engaged in a meaningful way when we talk about HIV/AIDS. It has sensitised the organisers and facilitators to some practical issues around access.

For example, ensuring that the workshop venues are accessible for disabled people, that the workshop materials are accessible through ensuring the workbook is available in Braille and that the necessary sign language interpreters are available.

The workshops have also sensitised the facilitators to the lives of people living with disabilities and how they are made vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This process of sensitisation has been of great value for all those involved.

*For further information, please contact Caroline Wills of the Policy Project on [cwills@polproj.co.za](mailto:cwills@polproj.co.za)*

#### NEWS FROM THE IPAA

#### ***Schooling aid for Burkina Faso's AIDS orphans***

Several international donors have granted financial aid amounting to CFA 47.19 million (US\$ 66,000) in order to finance a schooling project for 3500 AIDS orphans. The 'Schooling of AIDS orphans' project will permit the beneficiaries to receive school stationery for the school year 2001/2002. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), France, the Netherlands and Germany are the major donors of this project.

Ouagadougou will host the 12th International Conference on AIDS and STD in Africa (ICASA) from 9 to 13 December 2001. *For further information, please contact Christian Lemaire at [fo.bfa@undp.org](mailto:fo.bfa@undp.org).*

### ***Local doctors learn about HIV/AIDS***

Medical organisations in Johannesburg, South Africa have developed a programme to help doctors to better deal with HIV/AIDS, according to the SA Medical Association (SAMA). The programme was developed by SAMA's educational division, the Foundation for Professional Development (FPD) and the SA HIV Clinicians Society. HIV/AIDS is more common than diabetes and hypertension, yet the bulk of the medical profession is not equipped to deal with the disease that threatens to overwhelm the country's health care facilities and resources. More than 600 doctors registered for the course which started at the end of September in all major cities. The training programme is intended to reach all of the 17 000 medical practitioners who qualified before 1991 and were, therefore, not exposed to the pandemic during their undergraduate studies. On completion of the course, participants would be able to diagnose and manage the disease and sexually transmitted infections as well as understand vaccine development, be clear on all aspects of counselling and know when to refer people to specialists and support services. *For more information, please contact Ivan Lloyd at [illoyd@un.org.za](mailto:illoyd@un.org.za)*

### ***Ugandan Business Council on AIDS: Mandate***

The Ugandan Business Council on AIDS (UBCOA) was formed earlier this

year, and is open to all private sector organisations interested in fighting AIDS. Their introductory brochure, which discusses their mandate and proposed activities, is available on the IPAA web site ([www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org), then Africa Partnerships page, then Partners page). UBCOA has agreed on a best workplace practice for their group, and they will be offering to provide window stickers or some kind of public endorsement for any company adopting the policy. *For more information, contact Mr. Richard Etemesi, chairman UBCOA at [richard.Etemesi@ug.standardchartered.com](mailto:richard.Etemesi@ug.standardchartered.com) or Jantine Jacobi at [jacobi@infocom.co.ug](mailto:jacobi@infocom.co.ug)*



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