



## Re-organising support services

- Development of a mandating process for negotiations.
- Accreditation of the sector's bargaining council by the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration as a dispute-resolution mechanism.
- Signing of a wide-ranging Collective Agreement between employers in the sector and 12 unions at a Summit held in Pietersburg in January 2001.

### Strategic Goal Re-organising support services

This goal relates to a range of services that are essential to the effective delivery of health care to the public. It includes: Laboratory services and associated research facilities; blood transfusion services; health information systems, which are largely computer-based; pharmaceutical services, including effective controls on drug quality; and mortuary services.

The need for re-organisation arises either from the under-development of the service, from the fragmented nature of current arrangements or the inappropriateness of the existing service to changing conditions.

## Viruses are their business

They help devise the recipe for your annual flu jab; assist with Ebola and other deadly outbreaks across Africa; and may one day lay claim to a successful AIDS vaccine.

They are the scientists and technicians of the Johannesburg-based National Institute for Virology (NIV). An established player on the international health stage, the NIV is still part of the Department but is about to cut loose as an institute within the new National Health Laboratory Service.

The NIV plays a significant role in the South African AIDS Vaccine Initiative. Dr Lynn Morris, head of the HIV/AIDS Unit, was awarded the prestigious Wellcome Trust Senior Research Fellowship for 2000, the first woman in South Africa to achieve this. The HIV/AIDS unit contributes substantially to building expertise in medical virology. Currently it has 10 graduate students and eight research assistants.

For the public, the NIV – and Professor Bob Swanepoel in particular – is often associated with deadly outbreaks. This is due to the profile enjoyed by its Special Pathogens Unit, which assists with outbreaks of viral haemorrhagic fevers across Africa and Asia. In the year 2000 alone, this unit assisted by: Diagnosing the major Ebola outbreak in Uganda; supporting the Democratic Republic of Congo in managing its chronic Marburg virus epidemic; and dispatching a team to Saudi Arabia to advise the area about containing Rift Valley fever.

Closer to home, the NIV's Molecular Virology Unit assists in developing "seasonal" flu vaccines, particularly for the Southern Hemisphere. Its contribution centres on surveillance and molecular characterisation of influenza viruses. The head of the NIV, Professor Barry Schoub, is closely associated with this work.

The Unit has also done significant work characterising polio isolates and drawing up the phylogenetic tree of polio viruses for Africa.



## Transforming laboratory services

### Situation snapshot

- There are 234 public sector laboratories
- They employ about 4 500 people
- Rationalisation was raised as early as 1973
- Transformation Task Team set up in 1998

The year 2001 will see the birth of a new public enterprise, the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS).

- The NHLS will incorporate – and reshape– the laboratory services run by the provincial health departments plus:
- The National Institute for Virology (which is currently part of the Department)
- The South African Institute for Medical Research
- The Forensic Chemical Laboratories
- The laboratories of the National Centre for Occupational Health.

Towards the end of 2000, Parliament enacted the National Health Laboratory Service Act, which lays the foundation for this new entity and further provides that:

- The NHLS will be the preferred service provider in the public sector and therefore all health authorities will buy their laboratory services from the NHLS.
- Fees for the services to health authorities will be the main revenue source for the NHLS.
- Special branches or institutes may be established under the NHLS. The first of these will be the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, which takes up where the NIV leaves off (See page 46). The Department will continue to fund this institute by means of transfer payments.

A great deal of work was done during 2000/1 to pave the way for formation of the NHLS. The project management team consulted with trade unions and undertook an extensive communication and change management exercise with personnel working at the laboratories and organisations affected. Specialised advice was sought from appropriate consultants.

All staff presently working at any of the affected laboratories and organisations will transfer to the NHLS. An asset register, which includes land, buildings and equipment has been created to facilitate the smooth transfer of these assets to the NHLS.

## Rationalising blood transfusion services

### Situation snapshot

- Blood transfusion services are non-governmental
- They handle about 1-million donations a year
- Donors are not remunerated

