



SERO-PREVALENCE STUDY PROGRESSING WELL

Eighty-one percent of the target audience has been reached

Eighty-one percent of the targeted 25 000 students and staff have already participated in the HEAIDS Programme's sero prevalence and behaviour study that started in August last year. The initial results will be made available to the HESA Board in March, and the final national results are expected to be released in June.



Ms Nompumelele Mphaka takes a blood specimen from Prof Josua Meyer, Chair: School of Engineering, University of Pretoria, as part of the sero-prevalence and behavioural study that is nearing completion at higher education institutions.

Although there is great anticipation for the release of the national sero-prevalence figures, the results of the knowledge, attitude, perceptions and behaviour (KAPB) study are also eagerly awaited.

It will guide the content and approach of future HIV/AIDS awareness activities for students and staff at higher institutions countrywide.

The study is not completed yet. Circumstances at certain institutions, such as a strike at Thswane University of Technology and logistical problems at other campuses hampered progress to some extent.

According to feedback received from the survey team to date, the participation of academic staff during the scheduled testing visits at some institutions was slow on the uptake.

"The reason for this is unclear at present, but it certainly creates scope for future research," said Ms Managa Pillay, programme manager at HEAIDS.

The study team has closed off visits to 12 sites while mopping up activities are continuing at the remainder of the institutions. *HEAIDSnews* will keep you posted on the progress in our next edition in April. ■

CONTENTS

Constitutional Court Judge, Edwin Cameron, talks about his role in the efforts against HIV/AIDS

Page 2

UP discusses conflict between human rights and public health

Page 3

Calls for successful integration of HIV/AIDS in curricula

Page 3

Results of clinical trial on vaginal microbicide gel give hope for HIV prevention

Page 4

HEAIDS Programme organises symposium at 4th SA AIDS Conference

Page 4

More information about our mission, goals and programmes is available on our new website at www.heids.org.za

Final Policy Framework on HIV and AIDS ready for distribution

The final version of the Policy Framework on HIV and AIDS for Higher Education in South Africa will be distributed to higher education institutions by the end of February. The Minister of Education Naledi Pandor adopted the Policy Framework on behalf of the Ministry of Education in October last year. (*HEAIDSnews* reported in more detail on this important milestone in the December 2008 edition.)

HEAIDS Programme Director, Dr Shaidah Asmall, said the ultimate goal was for the education sector to take collective ownership of the framework. "Therefore, we consulted extensively with relevant internal and external stakeholders throughout the development process to gain an understanding of their perceptions and views," she said.

A monitoring and evaluation framework, which is aimed at assisting institutions with the effective implementation of institutional policies to address HIV/AIDS, has been added since the adoption of the Policy Framework. Further consultation on the M&E framework will continue with various roleplayers in the higher education sector.

HEAIDSnews strives to feature prominent South Africans that have made a special contribution in the fight against HIV and AIDS in South Africa and further afield. We interviewed newly appointed Constitutional Court Judge, Edwin Cameron, who also served on the HEAIDS Strategic Advisory Committee from its inception until September 2008. We asked his opinion on denialism, stigma, human rights, and leadership issues and, of course, the impact of the HEAIDS Programme. Read what he has to say on page 2.

Where institutions request this, HEAIDS will provide assistance with the development of institutional policies, using the Policy Framework on HIV and AIDS for Higher Education as a guideline. This process is expected to start towards the end of February. ■

The complete document is also available on the website at www.heids.org.za

A NOTE ON HEAIDS

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The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of HESA and HEAIDS and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or the Department of Education.

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Top judge to continue his advocacy role

Constitutional Court Judge, Edwin Cameron, talks about his role in the efforts against HIV/AIDS

HEAIDSnews: Denialism has been cited as South Africa's biggest stumbling block in curtailing HIV/AIDS effectively. You referred to AIDS as an "epidemic of silence". Is it changing, or are people still muzzled by their fear of public opinion?

Edwin Cameron: I believe that it is changing. The news that AIDS is a fully medically manageable disease is getting around, so people are becoming less scared of thinking about it, talking about it, agreeing to be tested. That is the experience of Botswana, which has taken the lead in normalising the disease and making it easier for everyone to be tested, and to be treated. We should be learning from their good examples and positive lessons.

HEAIDSnews: How do we break the silence?

Edwin Cameron: We break the silence with a ceaseless message of constructive action and hope. The campaign message is two-fold. First, that medical treatment can beat AIDS in an overwhelming number of cases. And, second, that stigma is irrational and kills. We must confront stigma head-on in the home, in the community and in the workplace – and of course in our tertiary institutions, on campuses, in classrooms and in our teaching curricula and syllabuses.



Constitutional Court Judge,
Edwin Cameron.

HEAIDSnews: Do you think our leaders are playing their part in influencing behaviour and opinions in a manner that will make a difference?

Edwin Cameron: There has been good mobilisation in business, and for the greatest part the media has played a positive role in AIDS awareness and education, and in promoting AIDS science. Ignorance and irrationality – from presidential level down – was our main enemy in this epidemic. It would be wonderful if more entertainers, political leaders, church leaders and sports heroes – and we know they exist – can state openly and matter-of-factly: Yes, I am living positively with HIV. It is a medically manageable disease and I am allying myself openly in the fight against stigma and for universal treatment.

HEAIDSnews: As a known expert in human rights, do you think there is conflict – or tension – between respecting human rights and being honest about HIV/AIDS?

Edwin Cameron: Not in the slightest. Openness about one's own status – negative or positive – is a subjective and individual choice. We can never take that human right away from anyone. We must foster conditions in which everyone with HIV will feel free to state their status without fear of discrimination or ostracising stigma. We know that protecting human rights is the way to foster those conditions.

HEAIDSnews: As a former member of the Higher Education AIDS Programme Strategic Advisory Committee you are familiar with the Programme objectives. Through mainstreaming knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS into teacher education and curricula, what impact do you think the HEAIDS Programme can make in changing the face of HIV/AIDS in SA?

Edwin Cameron: Because AIDS has been a disease of dreaded silence, we must start in the forums where we teach our people to articulate concepts in the classrooms of our schools and on campuses. I think integrating AIDS awareness into curricula, and into teacher training can have an enormously beneficial impact on this entire epidemic, because teachers at secondary and tertiary level hold the key to attitudes everywhere else.

HEAIDSnews: You have championed this cause for a number of years now. How does your appointment and status as a Constitutional Court Judge affect this advocacy and activist role?

Edwin Cameron: I speak on many, many different platforms – at unions and political meetings, in schools, on campuses, to workers and activists and organisers. I will continue to do this, and intend to stay positively involved in thinking about and helping to shape AIDS policies and responses. ■

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HEAIDSnews: How can our society overcome the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS?

Edwin Cameron: The simple facts associated with HIV infection are not the problem. The problem with HIV stigma and discrimination arises from human attitudes – attitudes fuelled by fear and ignorance. Those we can confront through positive messaging and good information. But we need strong political leadership, and clear political voices, and until recently, those have alas been lacking.

HEAIDSnews: Nearly ten years ago, you declared that you were HIV-positive, an action that has given you hero status in the eyes and minds of many South Africans. What impact can positive role models have on people's views on HIV/AIDS and on their behaviour in general?

Edwin Cameron: The true heroes of this epidemic have been the campaign workers of organisations such as the Treatment Action Campaign. As Zackie Achmat has rightly noted, there are many openly HIV-positive role models living in South Africa – they are mostly poor black people from the townships. It is our business, entertainment and political elites that have been slow in coming forward. We have many, many heroes. We merely need to acknowledge them: not only the activists, but the carers, volunteers, health workers, doctors and family members. These are the epidemic's true heroes.

CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

Human rights vs public health



Jody Kollapen, chairman of the Human Rights Commission.

The tension that seems to exist between human rights and public health in the context of HIV/AIDS came under the spotlight at the launch of Carmel Rickard's book, *Balancing Acts*, at the University of Pretoria (UP) on 28 November 2008.

The book launch coincided with World AIDS Day activities at UP and included a panel discussion chaired by Jody Kollapen, chairman of the Human Rights Commission. In the ensuing debate, which was attended by a group of about 100 students, staff and invited guests, it was evident that the individual perceptions about human rights within the context of HIV and AIDS seemed to differ vastly.

The discussion also raised issues such as male circumcision and female genital mutilation that are acceptable cultural practices among many African nations, but are often regarded as infringements on human rights by people from other cultures. Jody Kollapen referred to this dilemma as a conundrum that would be debated for a long time to come.

Balancing Acts was edited by Mary Crewe, director of the Centre for the Study of AIDS at UP. It forms part of the popular AIDS Review series. *Balancing Acts* does not only provide food for thought, but stimulates discussions on a wide range of human rights issues.

Visit www.csa.za.org for more information about the AIDS Review series of publications. ■

CPUT HIV/AIDS Unit reaches out to the community

The Belville Campus of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology involved youth from the local community in an awareness march and an interfaith thanksgiving ceremony to commemorate World AIDS Day on 1 December 2008.

Head of the HIV/AIDS Unit, Dr Ashraf Mohammed, called for effective and sustained leadership at local, national and international levels. "Experience has clearly demonstrated that significant advances in the response to HIV have been achieved when there is strong and committed leadership."

Dr AB De Villiers, head of Student Counselling added that it was the small actions of ordinary people that lead to major change. ■

(Source: Sarah Burdeniuk, HIV/AIDS Unit, CPUT)



Members of Tabeisa communicate a message of HIV/AIDS prevention to the local community at the Belhar Airport Shopping Centre.

Staff, students support campus VCT drive

A voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) drive organised by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology's (CPUT) HIV/AIDS Unit at the Cape Town and Belville Campuses was well supported by staff and students.

The main purpose of the drive was to give students a chance to just walk in and get tested. Individuals that tested HIV positive were given access to comprehensive support provided by the HIV/AIDS Unit and Campus Clinics. Dr Asraf Mohammed said they used every opportunity to reinforce healthy lifestyles in order to prevent risky behaviour. "Those that tested negative, we want to keep them negative," he said.

More VCT drives are planned for other campuses in Cape Town and in Wellington during the first quarter of 2009.

Visit www.cput.ac.za for more information.

Integrating HIV/AIDS into the curriculum

The integration of HIV/AIDS in curricula was discussed during a workshop at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) HIV/AIDS Centre in September 2008. About 35 departments were invited to participate.

One of the main concerns was whether it was possible for other faculties besides Health Science to successfully integrate HIV and AIDS education into curricula.

Professor Xiaohua Xia from the University of Pretoria showed how it was possible to integrate HIV and AIDS into Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering.

Group work and discussions proved fruitful as many ideas were exchanged on how to make this a success.

It was suggested that a uniform approach – with guidance from a dedicated steering committee – would facilitate this process. The committee would



Drama students performed a dance piece about HIV/AIDS.

work with individual faculties to create a module or a point system that could be used by all.

Please send news, information and success stories on curriculum integration at your institution to magda@hesa.org.za to feature in forthcoming editions of *HEAIDSnews*. ■

HOT OFF THE PRESS

GEL IS A HOPE FOR HIV PREVENTION

A clinical trial involving more than 3 000 women in southern Africa and the United States has demonstrated for the first time the promise of a vaginal microbicide gel for preventing HIV infection in women.

According to the findings released in Durban on 9 February by the Medical Research Council's HIV Prevention Research Unit, PRO 2000 gel was 30 percent effective. The findings were officially released at the same time by the Protocol Chair Professor Salim S. Abdool Karim at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Montreal, Canada. While encouraged by the results, the researchers who conducted the study, known as HPTN 035, say that additional evidence is needed to determine more conclusively the effectiveness of PRO 2000.

"These findings provide the first signal that a microbicide may be able to protect women from HIV infection. Indeed, for the millions of women at risk of acquiring HIV, especially young women in Africa, there is now a glimmer of hope. But these findings also indicate that more research is needed; we can't yet say that we have an effective microbicide," said Professor Abdool Karim, who led the multi-center study for the U.S.-based Microbicide Trials Network (MTN).

Microbicides are substances intended to reduce or prevent the sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections when applied topically inside of the vagina or rectum. A microbicide can be formulated in many ways, such as a gel, cream or in a vaginal ring. Several candidate microbicides are being tested, although none is yet approved or available for use. Earlier trials yielded disappointing results.

Currently, women comprise half of all people worldwide living with HIV. In sub-Saharan Africa, women represent nearly 60 percent of adults living with HIV, and young women are at least three times more likely to be HIV-positive than men. Although condoms help prevent HIV infection, women often cannot negotiate condom use with their male partners. An effective microbicide could provide women with an HIV prevention method they initiate. HPTN 035 evaluated the safety and effectiveness of two candidate microbicides for preventing male-to-female sexual transmission of HIV: BufferGel and PRO 2000. BufferGel had no effect on HIV infection, while PRO 2000 had a 30 percent level of effectiveness in preventing HIV infection. Both gels were found to be safe. The study was conducted between February 2005 and September 2008 and involved 3,099 women at six sites in Africa and one in the United States. South African sites were located in Durban and Hlabisa, KwaZulu-Natal. The South African Medical Research Council (MRC) was instrumental in conducting the South African research, under the leadership of Professor Gita Ramjee, Director of the HIV Prevention Research Unit at the MRC in Durban. ■



Principal Investigators Prof Gita Ramjee, MRC and Ian McGowan, MTN (right and left) with Mrs SM Hlabisi from the Hlabisa Community Working Group at the announcement of the PRO2000 microbicide research results.

For further information on this and other microbicide studies, go to <http://www3.niaid.nih.gov/> or <http://www.mtnstopshiv.org/news/studies/17>

Worth knowing

4th SAAIDS Conference: Durban, 30 March to 3 April 2009

The 4th South African AIDS Conference will be held in Durban from 30 March to 3 April. The theme is *Scaling up for Success*. Conference chairperson, Prof Linda Gail Bekker said prevention, treatment and care will be the essence of any successful plan to address HIV and AIDS and that the 2009 Conference programme will clearly echo these priorities. "What is different, however, is that we have moved on from esoteric debates and fruitless dialogue. South Africans are ready to roll up their sleeves and put a stop to the spread of HIV and AIDS," she said. The HEAIDS programme will hold a symposium at the SA AIDS Conference to share aspects of the Programme with delegates. Pre-conference registration for the 4th SA AIDS Conference closes on 13 March.

For more information and to register, go to www.saaids.com

5th International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention: Cape Town, 19 TO 22 July 2009

Abstract submission for the 5th International AIDS Society (IAS) Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2009) to be held in Cape Town, South Africa, 19-22 July 2009, is open online. As the fifth conference in this series, IAS 2009 will continue its strong emphasis on basic, clinical and biomedical prevention science. For the first time, the scientific programme will include a fourth track on Operations Research. This newest feature underscores the need to closely evaluate the individual and societal impact of the roll-out of HIV treatment and prevention programmes throughout the world. IAS 2009 is organised by the International AIDS Society (IAS) in partnership with the South African-based NGO, Dira Sengwe.

For more information about the Conference, go to www.ias2009.org

List your events on HEAIDS website

The HEAIDS Programme launched its new website in December 2008 on www.heaids.org.za. Some of the sections still require additional information and will be updated on an ongoing basis. To assist us in maintaining the content of this website, we invite institutions to submit information about forthcoming HIV/AIDS related events and meetings at their institutions to be included on the website events calendar. These events can relate to awareness drives, meetings, courses and discussions aimed at improving knowledge and understanding about HIV and AIDS among staff and students at your institution.

Visit www.heaids.org.za and scroll down to the Events Calendar on the home page. Go to [CLICK HERE](#) to tell us about your event. Complete the form and submit the information for approval and upload. We will consider all submissions and upload relevant information as soon as possible. If you have any queries regarding the above, please write to magda@hesa.org.za

Good to read

AIDS, Sex and Culture: Global Politics and Survival in South Africa by Ida Susser is a revealing examination of the impact the AIDS epidemic in Africa has had on women, based on the author's own extensive ethnographic research. The book is based on Susser's own story of growing up in South Africa. It looks at the impact of social conservatism in the US on AIDS prevention programmes and includes discussion of the experiences of women in areas ranging from Durban in KwaZulu-Natal to rural settlements in Namibia and Botswana. Sibongile Mkhize at the University of KwaZulu-Natal contributed a chapter to this book, and tells the story of her own family's struggle with AIDS.

Visit <http://eu.wiley.com> for more information about this book and where to find it.