

THE PRICE FOR TOLERATING INCOMPETENT HEALTH MANAGERS IS PAID IN LIVES

-- LEADING HEALTH CARE ORGANISATIONS CALL FOR ACTION TO OVERHAUL MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR.--

--Pretoria, South Africa 24 November 2009- The South African Institute of Health Care Managers (SAIHCM), the South African HIV Clinicians Society (SAHIVCS) and AIDS Accountability International (AAI) are calling on the Department of Health (DOH) to rapidly overhaul the management of pharmaceutical systems within the public health sector.

On 19 November, the television programme 3rd Degree ran an expose revealing that routine mismanagement of the national antiretroviral (ARV) drug supply by the National Department of Health is resulting in unnecessary sickness and death of thousands of South Africans living with HIV across the country. 3rd Degree found that although the Department of Health (DOH) has made considerable strides in the procurement of cheap, life-saving AIDS treatment, these strides are often negated by poor management and distribution of the drugs. Health care facilities are experiencing frequent stock outs of ARVs and other essential medicines due to inadequate pharmaceutical systems. The documentary highlighted not only the failure of prior political leadership, but also the pernicious effect of unqualified managers on the health care system in its entirety. Under the previous political dispensation, appointments at a national and provincial level often appear to have been made on the basis of loyalty rather than competence.

We believe that enough is enough; South Africans should no longer tolerate management failures that cost lives.

Prof Francois Venter, President of the Southern African HIV Clinician's Society, has expressed grave concern over these examples of consistent management failures. Not only do drugs run out, but no instructions are given to clinics on how to manage the stock-outs. Patients are sent away empty handed, month after month, yet the managers responsible for these failures are still in their positions. Prof François Venter said "When the Free State antiretroviral programme was suspended a year ago, we asked about stock outs. It was astonishing – not just antiretrovirals, and not just in the Free State. Across the country, health care workers told us of stock out, often for months, of TB drugs, of antihypertensives, of antidiabetic drugs, and the frustration of constantly reporting to structures that thought it was acceptable to simply say 'it is out of stock'. It is no wonder patients have lost faith in the public health system".

SAIHCM, SAHIVCS and the AAI fully support the recent comments of the Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi who has questioned the abilities of unqualified hospital managers and initiated an audit of competencies of hospital managers. We request that this audit extend beyond the hospital managers, to include the provincial and district health managers responsible for managing the antiretroviral drug system.

Dr Gustaaf Wolvaardt, a SAIHCM Director, said, "Being a health care manager is a huge responsibility, failure is paid for in lives, incompetence should not be tolerated."

AIDS Accountability International (AAI) has highlighted the link between the quality of healthcare in a country and whether those people most in need of anti-AIDS treatment are able to access

it. It has expressed that evaluating the accountability of those professionals responsible for delivering treatment is central to improving the quality of healthcare.

Mr. Rodrigo Garay, Executive Director of AAI said, “Accountability is essential in assessing the response to AIDS at all levels, this includes holding accountable the managers entrusted with this task.”

We call for:

- * An audit of all senior managerial posts within the Department of Health, at a national, provincial and district level, and a review of underperforming areas , especially where such positions impact on the response to the AIDS pandemic.
- * The DOH to make it clear to all health care managers that drug stock outs and service interruptions are unacceptable, and require urgent remedies and management accountability if they do occur.
- * The development of a reporting structure for health care workers and patients to report such stock outs, and an immediate investigation of reported stock outs and treatment interruptions.

The health of South Africans cannot depend on incompetent or under-performing managers, when we have the resources and new-found political commitment to improve outcomes.

Issued jointly for SAIHCM, SAHIVCS and AAI. Media enquiries can be directed to Jacques Roux on 012 816 9079 or jacquesr@foundation.co.za

About the organisations

SAIHCM, a membership organization that promotes the professionalisation of health management, believes that all healthcare managers must have a combination of a background in professional healthcare management, appropriate qualifications, and be able to demonstrate competency. While acknowledging that qualifications do not necessarily translate to competency, SAIHCM believes it is the first step towards creating a professional cadre of health managers. www.saihcmconference.co.za

The Southern African HIV Clinicians Society is the largest non-profit, membership HIV health professional organisation in the world with more than 16 000 members, most of whom work in South Africa. SAHIVCS is committed to ensuring the highest quality, best practice standard of health care for all persons living with HIV. www.sahivsoc.org

AIDS Accountability International (AAI) is an independent not-for –profit rating organization holding leaders accountable for the commitments they have made to respond to the AIDS epidemic. AAI in 2008 published the first ever country scorecard that rates how countries have responded to the epidemic. www.aidsaccountability.org