

Single ARV drug welcomed

Organisations affiliated to the fight against HIV and Aids have welcomed government's announcement of a tender award for a single dose of the triple combination of tenofovir, entricitabine and efavirenz.

As from April next year, patients who are on ARV treatment will no longer have to take three tablets but only need one tablet per day.

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) welcomed the announcement.

"TAC welcomes government's announcement that for the first time first line fixed-dose combination (FDC) ARVs and third line antiretroviral medicines will be procured for use in the public sector. TAC has been campaigning for the introduction of such FDCs in the public sector for many years," it said in a statement.

It said clinical studies have shown that FDCs improve patients' treatment adherence, which will improve treatment outcomes and reduce onward transmission of HIV.

"The benefits of FDCs also extend beyond patients to health workers and health systems. FDCs will make prescribing, dispensing and monitoring treatment easier for nurses and pharmacists. They will also simplify procurement and supply chain management. This is particularly important given the ongoing challenges with medicines supply, leading to shortages and stock-outs of ARVs and other critical medicines," said the TAC.

The announcement comes as the world prepares to commemorate the fight against HIV and Aids on 1 December on World AIDS Day. This is a day in which people globally unite in the fight against HIV and Aids and to remember the people who have died.

TAC further welcomed that for the first time some third line ARVs will be procured for use in the public sector. It said the provision of these medicines would offer hope for some patients who previously had no other treatment options.

It was concerned with the inclusion of Sonke in the tender after their lack of capacity to supply in the previous tender and contributed to the countrywide stock-outs of Tenofovir (TDF).

TAC said it would assist the department by embarking on a nationwide communication, education and awareness campaign on the introduction of first line fixed dose combination because it is something new. "We will also conduct workshops on the new third line treatment and where is it available in the public sector."

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) also welcomed the inclusion of the Fixed Dose Combination (FDC) formulations of ARV

drugs.

"The inclusion of FDCs is good news for the 1.7 million people currently on ARVs in South Africa, because they now finally have access to simpler and improved treatment options," said Dr Gilles Van Cutsem MSF's medical coordinator in South Africa.

"Rolling out drugs in FDC formulations will have significantly positive implications to help keep patients adherent to their life-long treatment," he said.

According to MSF, FDC formulations not only benefit patients but also relieve the burden on the South African health system by simplifying the ordering and monitoring of ARV stocks.

With fewer pills to pack, transport and dispense cost reductions are also possible.

The Themba Lethu Clinic in Johannesburg, which falls under the Right to Care, also welcomed the fixed drug. "Patients will find it easier to take their medication," the clinic said.

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