Lives at risk as ARV stocks fall say NGOs

The Department of Health has rubbished reports that several health facilities have run out of anti-retrovirals (ARVs) or have allowed stocks to diminish.

ARVs are in short supply at some SA clinics.
Image: Nenov Brothers [Fotolia](link)

According to a report by Stop Stock-Outs, a consortium of NGOs, the lives of nearly half a million people receiving ARV treatment for HIV are at risk because of shortages of the medication.

A nationwide survey was conducted between September and October by Stop Stock-Outs, whose members include Section27, the Treatment Action Campaign and Doctors Without Borders.

According to the group's research, 20% of the 2,139 health facilities that responded to the survey reported that ARVs and/or TB medicines were in short supply or not available.

But Health Department spokesman Joe Maila said: "The report that says South Africa is facing a crisis is highly exaggerated, and that is unfortunate because they are fully aware that South Africa runs the world's biggest HIV programme, with 2.4m people receiving HIV treatment from the public sector. This massive ARV programme makes it obvious that we are bound to face a few logistical glitches.

Monitoriing systems must improve

"We accept that strategies that are set out at national level do not always materialise in the provinces. We need to [improve] our monitoring systems," Maila said.

Mark Heywood, executive director of Section27, said: "This is an appropriate time to address the serious problems that face South Africa's huge HIV programme. We need to make sure that there is sustained access to the drugs. The whole

thing is in danger of going backwards if we don't."

On average, the report says, "stock-outs" last 30 days.

Dr Francesca Conradie, president of the Southern African HIV Clinicians' Society, said: "Stock-outs threaten to undermine strict adherence to therapy and the consequences and costs to the health system and patients can be grave, including the development of drug resistance, the risk of spreading drug-resistant forms of HIV and TB, increased immuno-suppression and increased risk of opportunistic infections ."

Source: Sunday World via I-Net Bridge