

Media Release
April 2010

**EARLY DIAGNOSIS DISEASE MANAGEMENT IS ESSENTIAL
FOR HIV/AIDS**

Commenting on Government's ambitious implementation of a R1.4 billion campaign aimed at the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, Katy Caldis, CEO of Fedhealth said she was encouraged to see such commitment and top level support for the campaign.

From a scheme perspective she said it would be advisable for all private medical aid members to embrace the programme and go for testing. "Getting tested is a critical entry point for HIV/AIDS prevention and interventions. Testing is no longer viewed merely as a diagnosis strategy, but is based on the member's need to know their HIV status for the purpose of changing their behaviour. This provides HIV-positive members with the opportunity to take care of their health so as to slow down the progression of the disease as well as to take precautions in order to reduce the risk of transmission. For HIV-negative members there is also a huge benefit to getting tested, Knowledge of their status alleviates anxiety and increases awareness of their vulnerability to infection and hence the need for behavioural change", she says.

"At Fedhealth we strongly believe in the value of Managed Health Care. It's important that members understand this management of their chronic condition is a facility put in place as a means to improve their clinical

outcomes. There tends to be an inaccurate perception that it is merely a way of containing costs to the scheme. The discipline of health risk management aims to balance cost (price and utilisation of healthcare services) with quality of care (best healthcare results or outcomes) and access to healthcare services.

When chronic conditions are identified at an early stage and the necessary treatment and lifestyle interventions are implemented, the quality of life of many sufferers can be improved and maintained.” Living with HIV is no exception. Although HIV/AIDS is a frightening disease for many people, the treatment available today allows the majority of people living with the virus to lead healthy and productive lives for many years. Fedhealth is just one of the schemes that has a managed healthcare programme in place for people living with HIV, just as there are programmes for members who suffer from cardiac disease, diabetes, asthma and other chronic diseases.

“There are currently 2 313 Fedhealth beneficiaries registered on the Aid for AIDS (AfA) programme of whom 81% are on antiretroviral therapy (ART). On average, in recent years 60% of the beneficiaries who joined AfA did so at a late stage of the disease when the optimal time to commence therapy had passed,” says Caldis. “This is tragic evidence of the fact that the message

regarding HIV treatment and its incredible results, is not yet being heard loud and clear by members. We are hopeful the Government's testing campaign will impact favourably on this by creating more awareness around the matter".

The most crucial factor in fighting HIV/AIDS is to start medication and other treatment at the right time. Medicines are available to attack the virus, while vitamins, good nutrition and exercise can play a critical role in keeping the body strong and healthy. "Starting treatment at the right time ensures the effectiveness of the medicines, improves quality of life and decreases the risk of serious infections or other complications," she says.

Besides medication to treat HIV, which includes drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission, AfA includes medication to prevent opportunistic infections; regular monitoring of the disease's progression and response to therapy; ongoing patient support through a nurse-line and clinical guidelines and telephonic support for doctors.

"Early registration on the AfA programme is therefore the key for the best possible management of the disease. By registering before medication is even needed, the member gains access to invaluable support and guidance thus preparing them mentally and emotionally for when they do commence actual treatment," concludes Caldis.

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