



Press Release

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SAfAIDS Launches Children's Antiretroviral Therapy Literacy Toolkit for Communities

Mexico City, Mexico - The Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS) today launches a Regional Children's Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) Literacy Toolkit for Communities.

The toolkit, which is designed in a child friendly manner, is a vibrant package consisting of several informative and interactive materials addressing issues surrounding antiretroviral therapy (ART) community preparedness for children.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), an estimated 1 500 children worldwide get newly infected with HIV every day and more than 90 percent of the infections occur in developing countries. (WHO, 2008)

While ART programmes are rolling out across Southern Africa, the region mostly affected, very few children are accessing drugs, aware of the programmes and actively involved in their own treatment regimes. Sadly, more than half of the children die before they reach the age of two, due to lack of access to treatment.

"The toolkit is aimed at enhancing children's knowledge on HIV and ART in an informative, educative as well as entertaining manner – through edu-taining methodologies," said SAfAIDS Head of the HIV Information Development, Documentation, Advocacy and Policy Unit, Rouzeh Eghtessadi.

She further highlighted that, "The toolkit is also aimed at supporting engagement of members of the immediate 'Circle of Care' for children, who include family members of children on ART or those who may need to start ART, teachers, health care workers, social workers, counsellors and all those who provide care to children to assist them in their supportive role, in the promotion of children and ART community mobilisation efforts."

Children on ART can now survive to adolescence and adulthood with proper uptake and adherence.

“SAfAIDS resolved to developing the children’s toolkit with support from key partner organizations, after identifying that there were gaps in accessing user friendly treatment literacy information targeting children and their carers, by Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and community members. We also noted that there was inadequate involvement of children in their own treatment, care and positive living initiatives and decision making processes. Thus the development of the toolkit seeks to plug related information gaps for southern Africa communities,” said Eghtessadi.

The toolkit contains an eight booklet series that engages several fun activities that address basic facts about HIV and ART, testing and disclosure, support for a child on ART, stigma and discrimination, positive living, adherence and supporting others on ART. The series is based on a concept of edu-tainment, which integrates education and entertainment strategies that enable enjoyable learning processes.

The toolkit also consists of an adherence calendar and a watch to remind the child of the exact time to take medication and enhance independent adherence responsibility. Other creative tools in the toolkit, include: advocacy stickers, ART Knowledge board game, 20 Quiz cards on HIV and ART issues and an Interactive Poster promoting resilience against HIV stigma and discrimination and respect for child rights.

SAfAIDS also incorporated a brochure on TB/HIV Co-infection, ART and Children in the toolkit, in recognition of the critical links between TB and HIV infection in the region.

As a follow up to the launch, SAfAIDS will conduct a skills building session on ‘Promoting Treatment Literacy for Children Within the Circle of Care’, on the 4th August 2008 at the International AIDS Conference. The session is aimed at sharing, exploring and empowering participants to be better advocates in children’s treatment issues as well as equipping participants with relevant knowledge and skills around child-specific adherence, opportunistic infections, stigma and discrimination and disclosure. The session shall equip participants with adequate knowledge on protecting and elevating the HIV and AIDS treatment related rights of children within their constituencies.

SAfAIDS realises that the community has a responsibility to support children on treatment, thus catalysing their adherence to treatment and positive living, and therefore encourages all community members to be part of the “Circle of Care” for children on ART, so that they can live longer, healthier lives, and realise their rights and full potentials in society.

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