



World AIDS Day commemorated with the urge to stay focused on targets

Press Release / 1 December 2021

On the 1st of December we commemorate World AIDS Day! This year, the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society (SAHCS) is not only reflecting on the tremendous work done to test, treat and improve quality of life of people living with HIV (PLHIV), but also on identifying targeted approaches to reach epidemic control by 2030.

South Africa (SA) manages the world's largest national HIV treatment program. Significant strides have been made towards meeting the 2030 UNAIDS targets of identifying at least 95% of those living with HIV, initiating at least 95% living with HIV onto effective ART and ensuring that at least 95% on treatment remain virologically suppressed. However, recently progress towards these targets has slowed, with only 5.3 million of the 7.7 million (69%) people living with HIV (PLHIV) having been initiated on Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART)¹. In addition, new infections among young women and girls remains unacceptably high (25% of new infections)² coupled with low uptake of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

To close these gaps innovative healthcare worker (HCW) capacity building initiatives are urgently needed.

"If significant improvements in differentiated service delivery, increases in human resources and HIV prevention can be realized, we will gain epidemic control, despite the demands of the COVID-19 [coronavirus disease 2019] pandemic." Dr Dave Spencer, Editor – The Southern African Journal of HIV Medicine (SAJHIVMED).

Since its inception in 1998, SAHCS has been at the forefront of the battle against this epidemic by driving and coordinating continuous medical education to all levels of healthcare workers, with the support of local and international clinical HIV experts committed to improving HIV/TB care in Southern Africa.

Capacity building, guideline development, high quality virtual learning, mentorship programs for HCWs, a network of HIV practitioners, and optimal use of data for programmatic improvements are core to SAHCS. Over the years SAHCS has prided itself on nurturing partnerships, with a primary focus on evidence-based learning, using innovative tools for sustained benefit. SAHCS has dedicated itself to working with the National Department of Health (NDoH), provincial and district health bodies to use epidemiologic, program and process data for comprehensive, quality, cost-effective, and tailored interventions.

Most recently SAHCS developed digitised Adult ART guidelines, and Gender-Affirming Healthcare Guidelines. SAHCS hosted a high-quality virtual conference, with an exceptional group of 106 invited faculty who presented from all over the world. The 5th SAHCS Conference covered topics such as long-acting anti-retroviral agents in the form of both injectable and oral formulations - which are poised to enter the market for both PrEP and treatment, new classes of drugs such as the capsid inhibitors and nucleoside reverse transcriptase translocation inhibitors, and delved deeper into long standing challenges such as the management of low-level viremia, the management of opportunistic infections, and covered the introduction of dolutegravir - which now has a role at all levels of the treatment cascade. The SAJHIVMED, which has the highest Impact Factor (IF) in Africa in the field of HIV, also recently published a Special Anniversary Collection entitled 21 Years of Science and Research towards the UNAIDS 2030 targets.

We applaud healthcare workers and the health sector for continuous perseverance and commitment to patient care. SAHCS remains committed to supporting and strengthening the capacity of its members, as we continue to collectively strive towards the end of HIV through quality comprehensive, evidence-based education, training and clinical advocacy.

End

¹UNAIDS. (2021). UNAIDS data 2021. https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2021/2021_unaids_data. Retrieved 29 November 2021.

²HSRC. (2018). The fifth South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication survey.

http://www.hsrc.ac.za/uploads/pageContent/9234/SABSSMV_Impact_Assessment_Summary_ZA_ADS_cleared_PDFA4.pdf. Retrieved 02 October 2020.