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TAC welcomes the implementation of the revised ART treatment guidelines

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TAC welcomes the implementation of the updated HIV treatment guidelines, recently published by the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC). The updated guidelines came into effect on 1 April 2010. The guidelines are available on the SANAC website at www.sanac.org.za.

The updated guidelines adopt some of the recent recommendations made by the World Health Organization (WHO). Most notably, the guidelines phase out the use of stavudine (d4T) in favour of tenofovir (TDF). TDF has fewer side effects and requires fewer treatment switches than d4T. The updated guidelines also permit earlier treatment for pregnant women and people with HIV and TB, early treatment for HIV positive infants, and improve regimens to prevent mother to child transmission. This move will ensure that South Africa will have 1 million people on treatment by the end of June 2010.

This treatment should be available in all health facilities in South Africa that currently provide antiretroviral therapy (ART) and TAC has made a commitment to inform the Department of Health of any facility that does not have the medicines. With the announcement of the new HIV Counseling and Testing Campaign (HCT), these new guidelines will be essential in providing quality, comprehensive HIV treatment. The HCT campaign aims to promote voluntary testing by all South Africans in a move toward every person knowing their status and taking responsibility.

Currently 5.3 million South Africans are HIV positive. In addition to the 900 000 already on treatment, there are 1 million people who are still in need of treatment. It is imperative that all South Africans (nurses and patients alike) are informed about guidelines including when patients should be initiated and how adherence can be followed up.

TAC is calling on the South African government to lead developing countries in insisting on sustained and increased financial and human resources for treatment and prevention at the UNGASS and UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) conference in September. Expanding financial and human resources is necessary to achieving universal access. As well as reducing AIDS mortality and new infections, universal access is vital to achieving a number of other millennium development goals such as reducing infant and maternal mortality.

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