

Health Department allows patients to get three months of antiretroviral treatment

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Joint TAC/SECTION27 statement

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The Department of Health has given the go-ahead for patients on antiretroviral treatment (ART) to be given three months supply of medicines instead of one month. The TAC and SECTION27 welcome this decision. It will be more convenient for patients because they will have to make fewer trips to their health facility. It will also reduce patient-load on the health system, particularly on health facility pharmacies given the shortage of pharmacists in the public health system. In a memorandum dated 2 July 2010, the Department of Health states, "There is no indication of any legislation prohibiting the supply of medicines for three months to any one patient. This practice should only be implemented once the patient has proved stable on the regimen."

The department's memorandum notes that this has implications for drug supply management. Initially, more space will be needed to store the additional medicines. It is also important that the drug supply is consistent.

This measure was recommended by the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) Treatment, Care and Support Technical Task Team. The Department of Health then adopted this recommendation. This is an example of how the SANAC process should work.

[The Consolidated Report of the Integrated Support Team](#) emphasised that the current model for the scale up of antiretroviral therapy is unsustainable from a health system perspective and unaffordable from a budgetary perspective. Innovative measures like this are therefore vital if we are to sustain the ART rollout. So are task-shifting measures, such as allowing lay counsellors to test for HIV and nurses to prescribe ART.

The Department of Health's memorandum is available here:

<http://www.section27.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/DOHMemoOnThreeMonthARTSupplyForPatients-20100702.pdf>

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