



TANZANIA: Referral hospital gets modern HIV/AIDS centre

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DAR ES SALAAM (IRIN/PLUSNEWS) - A US \$35-million HIV/AIDS treatment centre opened on Thursday at Tanzania's main referral hospital, the Muhimbili National Hospital, with a capacity to process up to 1,000 tests in an hour.

The centre, equipped with state-of-the-art laboratories, was built under a partnership between the government of Tanzania and Abbot Fund, a global health care company devoted to the discovery, development, manufacture and marketing of pharmaceuticals and medical products.

Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, who officiated at the centre's inauguration, described it a huge step forward in the campaign against the HIV/AIDS pandemic that is ravaging mostly sub-Saharan Africa.

He said Abbot Fund's initiative in fighting HIV/AIDS in the country reflected its trust and confidence in his government's efforts to tame the killer disease.

"Thank you for the support and partnership in the crusade against the pandemic," Mkapa told Abbot Fund officials.

"Through our successful partnership with the Abbott Fund, we are providing Tanzanian health professionals with resources and tools to more effectively manage our health care system," he said.

The chief executive officer of Muhimbili National Hospital, David Tregoning, said the treatment centre would greatly improve the care of people living with HIV/AIDS and other chronic diseases. He said the centre was one of the most modern in East Africa.

Abbott Fund's chief executive officer, Miles White, attended the inauguration. He said although the effort to provide quality lifelong care to people living with HIV/AIDS was centred at Muhimbili, work was also underway to develop HIV/AIDS treatment centres at 82 additional hospitals and rural health centres nationwide.

"Key areas of focus include modernising facilities, training staff, improving hospital and patient management and expanding capacity for testing and treatment," White said.

Already, he said, 1,300 physicians, nurses and other health professionals had been trained in HIV patient care, including testing, counselling and treatment.

He said Abbott Fund would invest \$100 million over five years to support anti-HIV/AIDS efforts in Africa and throughout the developing world.

"A significant portion of the commitment is in Tanzania," he said. Since 2001, Abbott Fund had invested \$35 million in the country to modernise health care systems, expand access to HIV testing and treatment as well as assisting orphans and vulnerable children.

White said Axios, an organisation specialising in health management in developing countries, was the implementing partner for the initiative.

A recent household survey by the Tanzania Commission for AIDS showed that about 7 percent of the country's adult population, or about two million people, were HIV-positive, and that efforts were underway to put 44,000 people on ARVs by the end of 2005.

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