

2014 First Things First HCT campaign launched at NMMU

Department of Health to provide coloured and flavoured condoms



Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, presenting the contraceptive implant.

The Department of Health is to distribute coloured and flavoured condoms Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi announced at the launch of the 2014 First Things First HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) campaign held at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) on 7 March.

Students should have no excuse now to be dissatisfied with the condoms that are freely available from the department and not use them Minister Motsoaledi said to an enthusiastic response.

Outdoing even Port Elizabeth's infamous wind against the marquee erected for the launch, Minister Motsoaledi captivated the audience with passionate pleas to students to use condoms consistently, to test for HIV, to get circumcised and to protect themselves against early pregnancy.

The Minister said the 2011 Antenatal Survey showed that 29.5% of pregnant women in South Africa are HIV positive.

"Of concern is the fact that of the total 33 446 women in the survey, almost 50% were between the ages of 15 and 24," he said.

Displaying the new sub-dermal contraceptive implant that protects women from pregnancy for three years, the Minister said the Department could make these available through campus health services at no cost. The contraceptive implant is inserted in the upper arm in a simple procedure. However the Minister emphasised the importance of "dual contraception".

"Given the high rate of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, always use a condom," he said. HEAIDS plans to distribute the new flavoured and coloured condoms as part of the First Things First campaign as soon as they become available.

Now in its fourth year, the First Things First campaign encourages students to take responsibility for knowing their HIV status. This is a necessary step towards treatment, care and support and preventing new infections.

"Treatment saves lives!" the Minister said.

Approximately 760,000 AIDS deaths have been prevented by ART and Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission scale up since 2004, he said.

Treatment scale up has also contributed to people with HIV living longer. The number of people living with HIV in South Africa

has risen from 5.2 million in 2005 to 6.1 million in 2012. This increase is explained by mortality data that shows an increase in life expectancy from 56 to 60 years between 2010-2012.

Having large numbers of HIV positive people on treatment and virally suppressed also helps to decrease new infections.

HEAIDS Director Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia said the First Things First campaign unites tens of thousands of students and staff at higher education and training institutions across the country to reject HIV stigma and test to know their status.


"Now in its fourth successive year, the campaign also promotes an enabling environment, in the immediate context of the campaign and cumulatively over successive years, for an effective response to HIV and AIDS that is free of stigma and discrimination," he said.

Dr Ahluwalia said the campaign would be rolled out at all higher education institutions and include the 50 Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges (TVETs).

"The extension of our mandate to support the development of a response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic at TVET colleges is a milestone achievement," he said.

Through the involvement of TVETs, the sector's HIV prevention, care and treatment programme is extended to some 500 000 more young people.

"We will now be looking after a population of more than two million spread over more than 400 campuses," Dr Ahluwalia said.

Among the high level representatives at the launch were the Vice Chancellor of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), Professor Derrick Swartz; Mr Jamangile Mbana, Chairperson of the Association of Colleges of South Africa; the MEC of Human Settlements, Ms Helen Sauls-August, who is also the Chairperson of the Eastern Cape AIDS Council; the Executive Mayor of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, Mr Nkosinathi Benson Fihla; Ms Kerry Pelzman for the United States government; Mr Chief Mabizela of the Department of Higher Education and Training; and the presidents of the South African Union of Students, the South African Colleges Students Association, and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University SRC. 

FROM THE HEAD and the heart



This is a historic time for HEAIDS with the expansion of the programme to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college sector. For this my deepest appreciation goes to the Department of Higher Education and Training, in particular former Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, Ms Hlengiwe Mkhize, who was party to initiating this development at the time I first joined HEAIDS; to the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, who had this as his only message to me at a parliamentary lunch he hosted in 2012; and to the serving Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, Mr Mduduzi Manana, who has driven and overseen the realisation of this vision.

I acknowledge too the support for this by the Global Fund, backed by the Presidency and the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC).

In light of this and other developments, like the National Skills Fund (NSF) grant to develop the capacity of academics to integrate HIV and AIDS into curricula, HEAIDS has increased its staff complement to manage the NSF and Global Fund programmes.

HEAIDS is now also recognised as one of six priority programmes of Government. This has manifested in me, as Programme Director, being invited to chair the Program Review Committee on HIV/TB/STI under the Presidency. In addition I have been asked to sit on the parliamentary portfolio committee that is to look at the transition of PEPFAR funding support being absorbed by the South African Government and, to sit on the Board of the South African Global Fund Review Committee to assist with future funding to the sector.

I am proud of HEAIDS' partnership with the South African Government, which also includes the Department of Health, Department of Social Development, and the Department of Public Service and Administration, and other government partners like that of the United States and Germany.

Ramneek



Dr Nono Simelela, HIV and AIDS Advisor to the Deputy President, with HEAIDS Director Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia on the eve of the 2014 First Things First national launch at the function to honour her for an outstanding contribution to the mitigation of HIV and AIDS. Dr Simelela spoke movingly of a close to 20 year journey at the forefront of the effort to overcome HIV and AIDS. The HEAIDS function also honoured the programme's partners for their unremitting support.