



MEDIA RELEASE

Celebrating a decade of service, a million HIV tests and 100 000 circumcisions

Johannesburg (19 November 2014) – The Society for Family Health (SFH) is celebrating the 10th anniversary of its New Start programme, an initiative that has proved that free HIV prevention services can be convenient, user-friendly and high quality.

Since New Start made its appearance in December 2004, the programme has conducted more than a million HIV tests with pre- and post-test counselling. In the last four years, New Start's seven medical male circumcision (MMC) sites have performed more than 100 000 circumcisions.

MMC is known to reduce the risk of HIV infection for men who have undergone the procedure by about 60%. New research suggests that there is also a protective effect for women who have sex exclusively with circumcised men.

“The HIV counselling and testing (HCT) service is a much more complete service than we were able to offer when we started out in 2004,” says SFH country director and New Start co-founder Scott Billy. “New Start now does 80% of its tests in people's homes and this encourages family members to share their status and support each other.”

Currently, when New Start does an HIV test it also makes certain to check for TB symptoms, collect a sputum sample for TB testing where necessary, and ensure that anyone who tests HIV-positive can immediately undergo a CD4 count test to establish whether s/he needs antiretroviral (ARV) treatment.

Men who test HIV-negative and are not circumcised are offered the option of MMC at a New Start facility. Families with other health and social problems are linked up with relevant services.

New Start works in a range of communities from centres in Nelspruit and eMalahleni in Mpumalanga; Soweto and Ekurhuleni in Gauteng; Pietermaritzburg and Umlazi in KwaZulu-Natal; and Bloemfontein and Welkom in the Free State.

“We are confident that we make a real difference in the communities where we work,” says Miriam Mhazo, deputy country-director of SFH and co-founder of New Start. “We follow an approach we call our general population model. This involves mapping out the area and visiting households systematically, road-by-road, until we know that the great majority of adults in an area are aware of their HIV status, have access to ARV treatment and MMC where needed, and that cases of TB are being picked up.”

Features of the New Start Programme that have contributed to its success include:

- *Moving with the times:* New Start is constantly transforming in response to new scientific evidence, evolving national strategy and emerging areas of opportunity.
- *Accessibility of services:* We have learnt that accessibility of services – which saves clients time, energy and money – is not a minor detail of service planning. It can be the deal-breaker in terms of uptake of HIV-prevention services.
- *Quality of services:* New Start places a high premium on the quality of the services it offers and has proved that free healthcare can be offered economically and efficiently, without sacrificing essential standards of service.
- *Working through partnerships and franchises:* the New Start programme has been a home not only for its own staff but for its partners, who are effectively franchise-holders of this valuable social brand. New Start could not have expanded as rapidly and maintained as a high a quality of service if SFH had insisted on “owning” the programme exclusively.
- *Protecting and leveraging a brand that has integrity:* SFH has been willing to share the New Start programme brand, but has taken great care to ensure that it is not compromised. Partners have been carefully selected. A common programme of training extends across the entire network of sites, no matter which partner is in charge of the site. The programme is carefully managed to ensure coherence and standard quality.

Hinting at plans for 2015, Scott Billy says: “We are doing market research on opportunities to expand into the provision of contraceptive products and services, and to extend the frontiers of HIV testing. We expect to be in a position to share our research and the proposals based on it early in 2015.”

Note to editors

The **New Start programme** was developed by **Society for Family Health (SFH)** in partnership with the government of South Africa. The programme is funded by the South African Department of Health and the US President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). SFH is a registered not for profit organisation and is an affiliate of Population Services International (PSI), a global social marketing organisation.

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