



Launch of the Gold Star Network Coast Province



Message from the Chairman, KMA - Coast Division



HIV/AIDS is a disease that is widespread with devastating consequences. Proper management and treatment is the only hope to check the spread. Given the stigma that is associated with HIV/AIDS, it is extremely important that care is taken in the management of patients. They must be given a choice of where they can get care and be treated confidentially.

For care to be successful, it must be standardised, accessible and affordable. Up to now public health services have led the way, but given the magnitude of HIV/AIDS, there is also a sizable proportion of people living with HIV/AIDS who would rather be seen by private practitioners. This is where the KMA/FHI partnership comes in. KMA brings a wealth of knowledge and technical skills, not only to train but also to monitor care and assure quality.

KMA has both young and old doctors, specialists and generalists, researchers and practitioners. KMA is a mixed bag. It brings a wide network of private practitioners as well as a wealth of experience in all aspects of healthcare.

As a trainer, KMA is instrumental in providing trainees with skills to manage HIV/AIDS.

FHI, on the other hand, brings in resource mobilisation, technical input and administration structures for resource management.

Therefore, this partnership is very important in management of HIV/AIDS and progress towards the universal access to treatment for all.

—Dr G G O Caleb Chairman
KMA-Coast Division.

Increasing Options for People Living with HIV/AIDS

Today marks an important milestone in Kenya's efforts to roll back the AIDS epidemic in the Coast province: The launch of the Gold Star Network.

A partnership of the Kenya Medical Association, Family Health International (FHI) and various other agencies, the Gold Star Network is an innovative franchising approach that involves private doctors and hospitals to increase access to lifesaving treatment for HIV/AIDS.

The Gold Star Network complements the gains being made in the public health care by increasing the options for people living with HIV/AIDS. While it is not a free service, it is designed to substantially cut the health care bill for those who can pay for services. The Network offers an opportunity to workplace and medical insurance schemes to provide affordable comprehensive cover to employees and clients which include HIV treatment and care.

The initiative aims to reduce the burden on public hospitals by using excess capacity in the private sector to fulfil the needs of HIV/AIDS patients. At its core is a private-financing model that involves training accredited doctors in private clinics, mission hospitals and workplace health programmes to provide safe and affordable ART to the highest standards of care.

The Gold Star Network builds on substantial gains made in the Coast since 2002, when the role out of ART treatment in the province began with programmes at the Coast Provisional General Hospital in Mombasa.

Only eight per cent of the more than 4 million people on the continent who are eligible for ART have access to it. Kenya has over the past three years been made impressive progress in finding ways to get medicine and other services to some of its over 1.1 million people living with HIV and Aids. To date over 70,000 patients are receiving ART.

With funding from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International Development, FHI has provided technical assistance in the establishment of comprehensive care centers at 49 district and provincial hospitals as well as 40 workplaces throughout Kenya that have managed to provide ART to about 11,000 adults.

While the journey to universal access is still long, the country has managed to lay the foundation for reaching the large number of eligible individuals with no access to lifesaving AIDS treatment and care.

"Kenya is on the verge of turning the tide on the epidemic," says John McWilliam, Kenya country director of FHI, a global organization that has played a major role in working with governments to shape Africa's response to the epidemic.

"One of the challenges is that public health care facilities are over-taxed and very crowded," says McWilliam. "The next step is to figure out other ways of getting services to the people and we have not tapped into the private sector. That's what the new initiative is all about."

Despite big achievements made in providing ART to patients in Kenya, thanks to an aggressive national response and a dramatic fall in the prices of medicines, the private sector has been left behind. Yet private doctors' clinics and hospitals, which comprise about half of all health care service delivery points, serve 40 per cent of the population.

Less than 20 per cent of clients on HIV/AIDS treatment in Kenya are managed by the private sector yet for most people this is the preferred point of health service due to confidentiality, personalized services and convenience.

A recent rapid assessment carried out by KMA and FHI highlights the gap. It found that whereas the large private hospitals and some company clinics are well equipped and staffed to provide quality care, the various nursing homes and clinics did not follow the national guideline on the management of patients with HIV. Only a small number of practitioners have been trained on antiretroviral treatment and only a few of the

providers said they refer HIV-positive patients to appropriate services, such as counselling.

It is not different for private medical schemes, most of which have traditionally provided inadequate benefits for treatment of HIV or AIDS. As a result, people saw no reason to disclose their HIV-status for fear of losing company benefits.

"In many cases, patients are discretely managed and there is no recourse in case they needed services beyond the scope of the particular providers," says Dr John Adungosi, FHI's medical director in Kenya. "Guaranteeing care in these circumstances is a big problem."

Gold Star Network promises to create a highly responsive network of providers with reliable links to various social services in the community that can guarantee comprehensive care for people living with HIV/AIDS

Designed to Bridge the Divide

It is designed to bridge the divide between public and private sector to consistent care from skilled providers across the board. By setting common standards and quality control measures, the initiative will ensure a patient can migrate from a public hospital to an accredited private clinic or vice versa without compromising the quality of care they are getting.

Each network member will be expected to deliver an essential care package comprising a range of services. These include HIV prevention, diagnosis and antiretroviral treatment, counselling and management of opportunistic infections. Patients will also be referred to established service providers for specialized clinical services and social support.

Participating clinics will display the yellow and brown Gold Star Logo representing quality and hope. KMA and FHI will ensure that only accredited health care providers use it.

As part of the brand promotion and standard care package, the network has developed a common set of materials with information on HIV treatment and care that doctors will distribute to patients.

The brand is considered key in addressing stigma, contrary to initial fears about the initiative being associated with HIV and AIDS.

"With the recognition that AIDS is just another chronic illness, now is the time to address the issue as openly as possible," says Peter Mwarogo, a public health specialist at FHI.

When a private practitioner becomes part of the Gold Star Network, he or she agrees to adhere to quality and brand standards, as agreed by the network. In exchange, the network member receives safe quality drugs which are approved by the World Health Organization and the Government of Kenya, technical support, regular training, and association with the high quality brand promoted by FHI and KMA.

The Network provides and opportunity for AIDS patients to continue accessing treatment even when the public sector suffers shortages of drugs as has been experienced with other medical conditions in the past.

To Cut the Drugs Cost

To cut the drugs bill and remove supply bottlenecks, FHI guarantees availability of quality

Partners



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drugs. FHI has contracted Pharm Access Africa Ltd, a company that works with large manufacturers to deliver affordable quality AIDS drugs in several African countries. This will immediately lessen the temptation for patients to stop treatment because drugs have run out or are too costly for them.

Another important component of the Gold Star Network strategy is to provide training in line with national guidelines. FHI and KMA have come up with customized training modules based on a curriculum initially developed by the National STD and AIDS Control Programme (NASCO) for healthcare providers in the public sector.

Besides the start-up specialized training, network members will benefit from continuous medical education in KMA's professional development programme and the support of a pool of experienced physicians that will provide constant mentoring.

Testing for HIV, starting ART and monitoring patient responses depends on high-quality laboratory services. Apart from the large hospitals, private health care providers lack the kind of equipment needed to track the progress of people on treatment, which is critical to success of ART.

Through the Gold Star Network, members will have access to certified state-of-the-art laboratories where they can send samples for tests at negotiated rates, further reducing the cost of care for their patients.

Counselling services Offered

Counselling is an important link in comprehensive care for HIV/AIDS patients. Right from the VCT centre, counselling plays an important role in the HIV-positive individuals life and his or her family's welfare. Patients on ART have to take the medicines regularly without fail for the rest of their lives and require constant advice and encouragement.

FHI and KMA have established ongoing counselling and support for clients through a local organization that will organize sessions dedicated to patients seeing private doctors. However, the long-run plan is to set up special counselling centres to serve patients seen by network members.

The Gold Star Network is funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through the United States Agency for International Development, and by Family Health International.



FHI supported laboratory services

