

Horizon

Thursday August 11, 2005

Science / Technology / The World of Ideas

New Aids drug on the way

Finally, some hope for the rising number of Kenyans with drug-resistant HIV

By Isaiah Esipisu

A new class of Aids management drugs, and the only option for patients who have developed resistance to current antiretrovirals, will be available in Kenya within an year. But at what cost?

Clinicians estimate that one out of every five HIV patients in Kenya have already developed resistance to the antiretrovirals. "The situation is already running out of hand," says Dr Jacob Joseph, a specialist at the Coptic Hospital in Nairobi, the biggest supplier of ARVs in East and Central African.

Access to the new drugs is good news, says Dr Joseph, but the costs could be prohibitive when they finally land in Africa, "what with developers wanting to recoup their research costs and placement of patents".

The new drugs are being assessed for approval in the US, United Kingdom and Japan. At a recent international conference on Aids medication in San Francisco, three companies presented promising data showing the drugs worked even in patients with drug-resistant HIV strains.

Drug-resistant strains

This comes at a time when the global medical sector is pondering what to do with patients who have developed resistance to the three main classes of ARVs.

When people with drug-resistant strains infect others, the latter are not treatable. "This is the biggest challenge in HIV treatment today," says Dr Joseph. "It means that the new patients cannot respond to any of the existing drugs from the word go. And it has further complicated treatment since the most vulnerable groups are getting infected with a germ that is already resistant to the existing drug options."

In a 2002 study of more than 1,600 patients in the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33

Turning water into money

By Erick Wamanji

Water is arguably one of the most profitable businesses in Ongata Rongai in the outskirts of Nairobi. The official water supply from Duncan Springs is enough for only about 1000 people in an area hosting over 70,000 residents.

Yet Ongata Rongai is one of the few suburbs in Kenya that enjoy almost 100 per cent water sufficiency, courtesy of private entrepreneurs. The area is ringed by about 25 major boreholes placed strategically in the area. The boreholes are mainly owned by individuals though a few belong to groups or institutions. Just as is the case with conventional water treatment plants, residents or

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33

PLAYING WITH DANGER



Photo/AP

German children offer bananas to man's closest relative at Ubud park in Bali, Indonesia. The monkey temples on the resort island of Bali are a prime photo opportunity for tourists, but most visitors are unaware they are at risk of contracting a little-known retrovirus which was recently found to jump from primates to people.

Another virus jumps from monkey to humans

By Margie Mason

The monkey temples on the resort island of Bali are a perfect photo opportunity for tourists feeding bananas to man's closest relative, but most visitors are likely unaware they're at risk of contracting a little-known retrovirus recently found to jump from primates to people in Asia. Simian foamy virus, called SFV, has not been known to cause disease, but a recent study triggers questions about its potential to possibly sicken

people in the future just as scientists believe the HIV virus evolved decades after it jumped species. In a study conducted at a popular monkey temple in Bali, lead researcher Lisa Jones-Engel of the University of Washington's National Primate Research Center in Seattle sampled 82 people working in or near the Sangeh temple. One farmer, who was bitten and scratched by macaques, tested positive for SFV, becoming Asia's first known case. "This is really a marker," Jones-Engel, study author, said. "The virus itself doesn't give us com-

plications right now, but it speaks to the context and the mechanisms for transmission." She said SFV is commonly found in many primates — 89.5 per cent of the 38 macaques tested at the monkey temple were positive — but has not been known to cause disease in animals. However, little research has been conducted on how widespread it

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

horizon@nation.co.ke