



# Significant Partner in the Fight against Aids

## When was the programme started in Kenya?

The Diflucan® Partnership Programme started in Kenya in October 2003. It was launched by the then assistant minister for Health Mr. Gideon Konchellah on behalf of Hon. Charity Ngilu, the Minister for Health. However, it had already been started in the NGOs sector in December 2002.

## How does it work?

This is a donation programme to the Ministry of Health by Pfizer. The Ministry is the lead agency that distributes the drugs to public health institutions and private organizations including the Walter Reeds project and Mission for Essential Drugs (MEDS) and other partners.

## Tell us more about the relationship with the mentioned partners and how has integrating other partners been of benefit to the programme?

Initially these drugs were received directly from Pfizer but it was felt that, for better coordination it was necessary to have one coordinating agency – the Ministry of Health.

## Who qualifies to benefit from the programme?

All health institutions need these drugs – provincial hospitals, district hospitals – all health institutions that offer antiretroviral treatment. Diflucan® is one of the drugs used in treating opportunistic infections which are common among HIV/Aids patients. Cryptococcal meningitis and oesophageal candidiasis or oral thrush, are two fungal infections common in HIV and which are difficult to treat.

## What is the criterion for health institutions to be included in the programme?

The health institution or organization must be providing ART treatment, accredited by the Ministry of Health and have staff trained in ART. There are many other facilities that qualify but which do not get the Diflucan® supplies. This is because the programme currently covers 124 health sites out of 285 countrywide. In future we would like to scale up to include more facilities.

## Can you quantify DPP support to Kenya since inception (in terms of patients numbers and the total value of the drug donated to date)?

Over 1 million tablets of Diflucan® have been distributed and the programme has supported 9,000 adults and children with HIV. The private sector has received 200,000 tablets.

## What is the significance of the programme in the country's healthcare system and budget?

Diflucan® is quite an expensive drug in the market. Through the Pfizer donation, the government is able to save and it uses the money to buy other medical items. The savings are \$9 million to-date.

## What would we lose if the programme was not in place?

Those patients who have benefited will have more complications. In addition,



As part of Pfizer's commitment to increasing the availability of medicines for those most in need, and strengthening countries' health systems, Pfizer created the Diflucan® Partnership Programme, a philanthropic venture. Through the programme Pfizer works together with governments and non-governmental organizations in the developing countries to provide free of charge Diflucan® (fluconazole) an antifungal drug that treats two fungal opportunistic infections associated with HIV/AIDS. While Diflucan® is not an AIDS drug, it has proven highly effective in treating two life-threatening opportunistic infections most commonly affecting HIV and AIDS patients, namely Cryptococcal Meningitis and Oesophageal Candidiasis. This donation has no limit to time and patients on treatment will receive Diflucan® as long as they need it. DR. IBRAHIM MOHAMMED, the Head of the National AIDS/STD, TB and Leprosy Control (NASCOP/NLTP) of the Ministry of Health (inset) gave the following response to the Daily Nation on what the Diflucan® Partnership Programme is and what it is doing for Kenya. Below are excerpts.



## Donated tablets are pink

Pfizer's support also includes training health workers in the management of opportunistic infections as well as providing information, education and communication (IEC) materials. More than 300 health workers have been

trained on the management of opportunistic infections. Now the training component is to be put in the national ART curriculum for sustainability purposes

## What is oesophageal candidiasis?

Oesophageal candidiasis is a fungal infection of the oesophagus most commonly caused by Candida (a type of yeast) which is normally found in the mouth, skin and stomach. It is reported in 20-40 per cent of HIV patients and associated with painful swallowing and chest

pains. If left untreated, the infection can cause severe discomfort, weight loss and fatigue. Diflucan has proven to be highly effective in treating this infection.

## What is Cryptococcal Meningitis

Cryptococcal meningitis is a painful life-threatening infection of the membrane that

surrounds the brain and the spinal cord. It occurs in about 10 per cent of HIV patients.

The onset is gradual, causing fatigue, fever, weight loss, headache, nausea, vomiting, confusion, drowsiness, sensitivity to light and blurred vision.

Life-time treatment of this infection is necessary to prevent relapse.



## Is monitoring and evaluation done to confirm that the intended are the ones benefiting and that everything works according to plan?

This is one of the conditions for us to get re-supply of drugs. Pfizer provides inventory management tools that help us in the monitoring and evaluation. We report at the end of every six months on how many patients have been given Diflucan®

## Generally how successful would you say has the programme been in Kenya?

It has been quite successful. This venture between Pfizer and the Ministry of Health to fight fungal infections in HIV patients has been able to improve the quality of life for many patients.

## Are there any challenges, how are they being addressed?

The main challenge has been training. A lot of training is required to sensitize health workers about this partnership. Once they have been adequately sensitized they will help make this programme even more successful. Even members of the public need to be sensitized about this programme so that they know for those living with HIV Diflucan® is available. They will be able to seek treatment earlier.

NASCOP/Ministry of Health receives the donated Diflucan® but customs clearance has always been an issue.

## Going forward what would you like to say in conclusion?

We would like the partnership with Pfizer to continue so that more patients can benefit. It would help in treatment of opportunistic infections which often attack people living with HIV. Furthermore, most of our people are poor and living with HIV is a big challenge to them. A tablet would cost Sh.785 and if a patient, who is poor, is going to use for 10-14 days that is a big challenge. HIV patients who are getting Diflucan® free of charge are able to live longer as healthier people who can do productive work and support themselves and their families.

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