New York Times Examines Expanding Treatment, Care In Africa For HIV-Positive Children

- VIH/Sida - Accès aux ARV et aux soins - Enfants VIH+ -

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The New York Times on Wednesday examined how care and treatment for HIV-positive children in Africa gradually is expanding and improving. According to the Times, children largely have been left out of HIV/AIDS treatment programs for several reasons, including that : fewer children than adults are HIV-positive, with 2.1 million HIV-positive children in sub-Saharan Africa compared with 25 million HIV-positive adults ; diagnosing HIV in children younger than 18 months is expensive and specialized ; treating HIV-positive children is more complex than treating adults because drug dosages need to be adjusted as children grow ; and pediatric antiretroviral drugs are more expensive than those given to adults. Without treatment, half of all HIV-positive children die before age two, according to the Times.

"Countries were much more focused on the adults who were dying," Chewe Luo, senior program adviser on HIV/AIDS and health for UNICEF, said, adding, "Nobody stopped to think about children. It is only in the past year that pressure has mounted to treat them." African governments, international agencies and nongovernmental organizations "have begun to train the region's ragtag health care corps to treat children," the Times reports.

Negotiations by some charitable foundations, such as the Clinton Foundation, have reduced the cost of pediatric antiretroviral drugs to as little as $200 annually, half of what they previously to cost, the Times reports. In addition, two pediatric HIV/AIDS clinics have opened over the past year in Lesotho, one funded by the Clinton Foundation at the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Maseru and the other as part of the Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative (LaFraniere, New York Times, 3/8).

Baylor College of Medicine and Bristol-Myers Squibb in June 2005 launched the Pediatric AIDS Corps, which plans to send as many as 250 physicians to Africa for a two-year program to train local health care workers and treat HIV-positive children (Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report, 2/28). ub-Saharan countries such as Lesotho — where only 261 of the government-estimated 8,000 children in the country who need antiretroviral drugs are receiving them — continue to face challenges in pediatric HIV/AIDS care, the Times reports (New York Times, 3/8).

U.N. Envoy Launches Campaign To Support African Grandmothers Raising HIV/AIDS Orphans

U.N. Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa Stephen Lewis on Tuesday at a news conference in Toronto launched a campaign to raise money and awareness for the millions of grandmothers in Africa who are raising grandchildren whose parents have died of AIDS-related complications, the Toronto Star reports (Black, Toronto Star, 3/8). The campaign seeks to encourage grandmothers in Canada to donate money for grandparent-headed households in Africa to help pay for grief counseling, job training and provisions (Jimenez, Globe and Mail, 3/8). Funds would go to support such groups as the Gogo Granny Outreach Project, a 35-member support group in South Africa that brings grandmothers together for weekly meetings to talk, share their grief and learn new skills, such as gardening and sewing. Five Canadian grandmothers' organizations in the provinces of British Columbia and Saskatchewan have raised about $22,600 for the campaign (Toronto Star, 3/8). According to HelpAge International, a network of not-for-profit organizations that supports elderly people around the world, half of all orphaned children in Botswana and Malawi — and 60% in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe — are being raised in grandparent-headed households (Jimenez, Globe and Mail, 3/8).

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