

## Pharmacists join the TB fight

The Independent Community Pharmacy Association (ICPA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) are preparing the roll-out of out a joint TB screening and treatment initiative as part of the USAID TB Care II programme.



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### Pilot project flighted

“The ICPA is working with USAID on a pilot project that initially will use 100 participating community pharmacies in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Gauteng to promote TB awareness, education, basic screening and referral through the pharmacy network – with the overriding objective being improved quality of TB services, increased availability of TB treatment, and improved management of TB support systems,” says Mark Payne, ICPA CEO.

“Pharmacies can contribute substantially to the management of TB in South Africa and can play an important role in shouldering some of the burden of providing quality healthcare services to the people of South Africa,” says Payne.

Lerato Lebona, the public private mix coordinator for the USAID TB Care project, says that the pharmacy industry has been identified as a strategic entry point to finding TB cases in communities.

“Involving ICPA member pharmacies will help increase early detection of TB cases so that people with the disease can be found, linked to care and treated faster. This will contribute to the national response and control of TB in the country. The overall goal is to have TB screening services fully integrated in pharmaceutical services as pharmacies join the fight against TB in communities.”

### How the TB Care programme works

Having received training from USAID, participating pharmacies will provide the public with educational literature on TB to increase their awareness of the risks, symptoms and treatment options. Pharmacies will be screening people for TB and those found to have a high risk of carrying the disease will be referred on to treatment centres.

“Pharmacists will NOT diagnose and treat TB themselves – this is the role of the TB treatment centres. When it comes to identifying patients with TB, the independent pharmacist is aware of the common symptoms of the disease and is able to

refer patients to appropriate facilities for diagnosis and management,” says Payne.

## **Avoiding drug resistant TB**

One of the primary causes of drug-resistant TB is the arduous treatment programme and the related side-effects.

In South Africa, about 15% of patients are said to default on the first-line, six month treatment while almost a third of the patients default on second-line treatment.

According to the ICPA, pharmacists are well-placed to assess adherence to treatment and identify any factors which may predispose the patient to non-adherence.

## **Adhering to the treatment regimen**

Pharmacists can also assist with adherence to treatment by helping those patients who experience adverse effects from the anti-TB medicines by providing a counselling services.

The ICPA concludes by saying that the community pharmacy is often the first port of call for TB sufferers and, in collaboration with USAID on the TB Care initiative, will remain at the forefront of effective TB diagnosis and treatment for many patients.

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