



NEWS

SAMA AND SOUTHERN AFRICAN HIV CLINICIANS SOCIETY CONDEMN MATTHIAS RATH

SAMA

The South African Medical Association (SAMA) notes with concern the resurgence of unfounded claims of alternative therapies for the treatment of HIV/AIDS as well as fallacious information contained in recent newspaper advertisements.

Most notable, the Dr Rath Foundation has advertised in national publications where they selectively quote from scientific papers and distort the information. In addition, they attack civil society organisations such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and undermine the authority of statutory organisations such as the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa (ASASA).

Claims are also made with regard to the role of nutrition in the management of HIV/AIDS. In the advertisements patients were advised to discontinue their antiretroviral (ARV) treatment for various nutritional programmes, claiming these programmes brought better results. Professor Denise White, vice-chairperson of SAMA, added that nutrition in conjunction with ARVs is vital in the long-term treatment of HIV infection. 'Any claim that purports that nutrition alone can deal with HIV/AIDS is untrue and suggestions that patients stop their treatment in favour of natural therapies is irresponsible,' she said. SAMA urged government to reject the misinformation of such organisations and to tackle HIV/AIDS based on sound scientific reason.

Other claims with regard to the exorbitant costs and toxicity of drugs like zidovudine (AZT) and nevirapine are a further example of misinformation. ARVs have become considerably more affordable and the issues of toxicity and adverse effects are well researched and understood by the medical profession.

'This reprehensible behaviour is despicable considering the enormous human cost of the HIV pandemic in South Africa,' said Professor White.

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Southern African HIV Clinicians Society

In a double-page spread advertisement which appeared in national newspapers including *The Sowetan* on 26 November 2004, the Dr Rath Health Foundation claimed that ASASA was attempting to ban and discredit natural health in direct opposition to medical and biological science.

To the Society's knowledge ASASA does not have the authority to ban 'natural health' nor are they attempting to do so. Neither are they intent on discrediting 'natural health'. They are a consumer body which take up complaints with regard to perceived untrue, exaggerated and/or misleading claims made in advertisements in the South African media.

ASASA upholds the national Code of Advertising Practice in an attempt to prevent the South African consumer from being duped by unethical advertising practices into buying products which do not deliver promised benefits.

In *The Sowetan* of 11 March 2005, the Dr Rath Health Foundation together with the Traditional Healers Organization of South Africa and the South African National Civic Organization (SANCO), placed another double-page spread advertisement with the headline banner: 'There is no place for the ASASA in Democratic South Africa.' It has the by-line: 'The drug industry-funded Advertising Standards Authority (ASASA) is trying to keep life-saving health information from the people of South Africa.' In fact, there is a tax on all media advertising which supports the existence of this body. Using Dr Rath's logic it could therefore be claimed that Dr Rath's Foundation is part-funding ASASA by placing such large advertisements in costly high-readership daily newspapers.

Dr Rath may not be aware of the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society's published pre-antiretroviral treatment (ART) guidelines, compiled and written by a sub-committee of South Africa's most distinguished HIV/AIDS experts. These guidelines give due attention to the use of nutritional and other supplementation (e.g. vitamins) before the administration of ART, which is usually reserved for 6 - 7 years after HIV infection, i.e. when the immune system has been so badly damaged that the infected person's white blood cells (T-helper) or CD4+ cells have decreased in number to fewer than 200.

Dr Rath's Foundation and colleagues may also face accusations of misleading consumers due to the claims that AZT is 'extremely toxic and kill[s] people. They damage the immune system, thereby worsening immune deficiency. This is why many people taking AZT develop tuberculosis and other infectious diseases.' AZT is one of the most widely used and researched ARVs used worldwide in the treatment of HIV/AIDS.

Dr Rath says in his more recent advertisement that the TAC and 'their financial backers: the Rockefeller Foundation, support the pharmaceutical cartel' and that as a result South Africans pay the price with 'AIDS and their lives'. It continues to say that '....the pharmaceutical industry's business in our country SA depends on the continuation of the AIDS epidemic.'

The DMI research data produced by a highly respected research house track all classes of pharmaceutical preparations from pharmaceutical companies/warehouses to pharmacies and, among others, calculate the percentage of the



pharmaceutical Rand for which the classes of drugs are responsible. ARVs account for only a very small percentage of the total pharmaceutical market. Much larger markets are: antidepressants, antibiotics, anti-inflammatory drugs, antihypertensives, etc. They believe, therefore, that the above statement is incorrect.

UNITED NATIONS AND WESTERN CAPE GOVERNMENT CONDEMN MISINFORMATION ON ARVs

United Nations

A recent advertising campaign is touting the benefits of vitamin therapy above antiretroviral therapy (ART) and claiming that ART is toxic. These advertisements are wrong and misleading, said the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

WHO, UNICEF and UNAIDS have condemned the irresponsible linking of their names to claims that vitamins and nutrition therapy alone can prevent AIDS deaths.

A number of accounts published by Matthias Rath on his website and distributed as flyers and advertisements within South Africa state that a number of UN bodies including WHO, UNICEF and UNAIDS endorse his approach. The three UN organisations are extremely concerned about these misrepresentations and note that the Rath Foundation uses quotes and information from UN agencies out of context. Misrepresentation of this sort is both dangerous and unhelpful.

As in the population at large, a good diet that provides the full range of essential micronutrients is important to the health of people infected with HIV and can help bolster the immune system, boost energy levels and maintain body weight and well-being. Guidelines published jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and WHO in 2003 offer simple dietary suggestions for people living with HIV and AIDS.

Vitamins and nutritional supplements alone cannot take the place of comprehensive treatment and care for people living with HIV/AIDS, including prophylaxis and treatment for opportunistic infections (OIs) and ART, where indicated, as well as a good, balanced diet. ART has been shown in numerous studies to reduce the replication of HIV in the body, reduce the incidence of OIs and AIDS-related illness and improve quality of life. In countries where it is widely available, ART has turned AIDS from a 'death sentence' into a chronic but manageable disease. As with any other drugs, ART has side-effects that have been documented in clinical trials.

A fact sheet entitled 'AIDS treatment, nutrition and food supplements' is available on www.who.int/3by5/mediacentre/fsFood/en/.

Western Cape government

Western Cape Health minister, Pierre Uys, says in a press release that 'It has come to the attention of the Western Cape Provincial Department of Health that misinformation is being spread in respect of the use of antiretroviral medication'.

He reassured the public regarding the benefits and risks of antiretroviral medicines: 'Antiretroviral treatment prolongs life, decreases illness and improves the quality of life of people with AIDS. This is well documented in numerous well-designed and scientifically sound studies conducted locally and abroad.'

Uys says that in countries where ARVs are routinely prescribed when clinically indicated in patients infected with the disease, rates of hospitalisation and death have decreased considerably and productivity and quality of life of these patients have been improved dramatically. There are now more than 7 000 patients on treatment in the Western Cape, the majority of whom are experiencing the same benefits.

Health care providers in the Western Cape are trained in clinical and laboratory monitoring of patients on ARVs, and the management of adverse effects, should they occur. In addition, treatment guidelines outlining management of adverse reactions are distributed to all relevant health facilities and a 24-hour medicines information line for health staff has been set up for queries or advice that may require.

Minister Uys stated that 'We would [also] like to express our concern about the possibility that the programme is being undermined by the distribution of information, which creates any confusion about the benefits and risks associated with antiretroviral treatment.'

Minister Pierre Uys can be contacted at tel 082 455 5144.

FNS

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

HOW TO MANAGE PROFITS

The key principle to improving profitability is by managing margins up and overheads down.

Managing margins up

Regarding the income statement you will notice that you can improve margins by any of the following or combinations thereof:

- increasing the volumes of sales
- increasing selling prices per unit
- decreasing the cost of the items sold.

A common mistake made by businesses in an attempt to increase profits is that they offer discounts to increase their