



SAMA'S TREATMENT PROGRAMME LAUNCHED

SAMA recently launched its Tshepang HIV/AIDS treatment programme at a glittering occasion in the Johannesburg Botanical Gardens. This succeeded in creating widespread public awareness of the Association's intention to implement a plan for thousands of South Africans who cannot afford private health care.

SAMA chairperson, Dr Kgosi Letlape, appealed to the nearly 800 guests that 'now our biggest challenge is to raise the funds to make it happen'. The estimated cost of implementation is R80 million, which SAMA hopes to raise from national and international



Mr Peter Moyo, MD of sponsor Old Mutual Healthcare; Kerishnie Maiker, master of ceremonies, and Dr Kgosi Letlape, chairperson of SAMA, at the launch of SAMA's Tshepang HIV/AIDS Treatment Programme.

Mr Zachie Achmat, head of the Treatment Action Campaign who is living with HIV, also attended the function. The activist did not bow under public pressure to start taking antiretroviral drugs, and reaffirmed his stance to take drugs only once antiretroviral treatment was made widely available to all South Africans with the disease. 'I reiterate that I will take the medication once it is feasible to do so,' Achmat said.

Magda Naudé

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sponsors. The Nelson Mandela Foundation has already given its support to the initiative.

The programme dedicated to 'Baby Tshepang' who was brutally raped last year, is designed to provide free antiretrovirals to 9 000 public sector patients at 18 treatment sites countrywide.

Mr Nelson Mandela, patron of the SAMA HIV/AIDS Treatment Programme and guest of honour at the event, said words alone could not put the brakes on the disease. 'To talk is not sufficient. What is more important is what we are doing on the ground.'

Letlape emphasised after the launch that 'now the real work starts. There are thousands of patients out there who need us. We must raise the funds, train more doctors in the management of HIV/AIDS, and mobilise every doctor in this country to get involved in meeting the expectations of communities fighting this pandemic.'

Letlape lashed out at society's prejudice against people living with HIV/AIDS. 'It is time to wake up and get involved and serve one another as human beings.' He said the AIDS scourge affected everybody and was a test of our humanity.

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