



Southern African HIV Clinicians Society
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Press statement from the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society

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North-West Province: A health system on its knees

Professor Yunus Moosa, President, and Lauren Jankelowitz, CEO, on behalf of the Board of Directors for the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society (the Society) strongly condemn closure of healthcare facilities in the North West Province of South Africa. The humanitarian crisis that is unfolding as a result of this will have a far-reaching impact on the lives of people.

For the past six weeks, the Stop Stockouts Project (SSP) has been actively monitoring medicines that are out of stock (or where stockouts are imminent) through the hotline based at the offices of the Society, and through daily contact with patients, healthcare workers, and government. The SSP is a consortium of six civil society organisations dedicated to assisting the thousands of people whose lives are threatened by the shortages of essential medicines and children's vaccines in South Africa. The SSP, initiated in late 2012, is a collaborative effort between Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the Rural Health Advocacy Project (RHAP), Rural Health Doctors Association of Southern Africa (RuDASA), Section 27, the Society, and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), who recognised that monitoring drug stock outs and shortages of essential medicines in primary healthcare facilities was a national priority.

In the North West Province, over the past several weeks, 394 public health facilities serving a population of approximately 3.1 million people have been affected by this crisis. Recently, some medicines have been delivered to several hospitals who have informed us that they cannot cope with the demand, and are quickly running out. SSP are calling health facilities to inform them of the best places to refer their patients, but often, patients arrive to find the stocks are already depleted.

Since the 23 April 2018, the SSP has been working closely with the National Department of Health, in order to develop a response to the crisis and to address how interventions could be swifter. Proper HIV management and care remains a high priority in this country and a lack of access to ARVs and TB medicine in particular will precipitate a bigger disaster than anyone is prepared to admit.

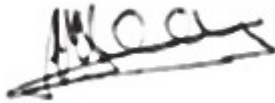
Irrespective of valid reasons to strike, the destruction of clinics and hospitals, threat to healthcare workers' lives and homes, and closure of clinics is absolutely unacceptable. This crisis has exacerbated the issues that overburdened health facilities already face, endangered the lives of healthcare workers and infringed on the basic human rights of people with chronic diseases.

The Society would like to urge healthcare users to send a Please Call Me, SMS, or phone the SSP hotline on 084 855 7867 or email: report@stockouts.org in order to find out where to access their medicines so that they can return to treatment as soon as possible. It is vital that these people living with HIV demand a viral load test within three months of having their treatment reinitiated, in order to ascertain whether they have been able to virologically suppress again. It is of utmost importance that healthcare users who are reminded and advised and even yelled at to adhere firmly to their treatment, and then are denied access for whatever reason, be treated as emergency users. We are

dismayed to learn, that in the midst of this crisis, the new first-line ARV anticipated to rollout this year, will not be rolling as soon as previously anticipated, when people living with HIV in the North West province require urgent access to this more robust medicine, particularly as their health system has let them down.

To all healthcare workers struggling alone in remote parts of the North West province, please contact us so that we can support you, link you to functioning healthcare facilities, and ensure your voices are heard.

Yours sincerely



Prof Yunus Moosa
President, SAHIVSOC



Lauren Jankelowitz
CEO