

FROM THE EDITOR

What an exciting time we are having in terms of HIV meetings in South Africa this year! I can't wait to finally get to the 4th SA HIV Conference in Durban, and in July we will be back here in the Fairest Cape at the HIV Pathogenesis Conference – always very worth while in terms of the new findings and new thinking it attracts. Both conferences have had an excellent number of abstracts, so peer reviewed input at both is going to be great.

This edition of the journal is the usual smorgasbord of HIV issues from guidelines to clinical, ethics and debate. It will be available at the Durban Conference. Honermann and colleagues explore the ethicolegal aspects of labour practices related to HIV-infected employees, and in particular the stance that the military took on HIV-infected recruits. Firnhaber and colleagues re-look at hepatitis B and HIV co-infection and review diagnosis, management and outlook. Osih and Venter give us a rapid-fire tour de force of the recent Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections held in Montreal in February. Polly Clayden, a favourite author, brings us a clear review on the state of ART in relation to pregnancy. The Clinician's Society and a number of other groups present their consensus statement of timing for initiation of ART and who in our

patient load should receive expedited ART commencement – an important reminder that despite the pervasive notion of 'there is no emergency in HIV', unnecessary delays in treatment can result in a great deal of morbidity and mortality. Practitioners need to be sure that perfection (taking many weeks to get a patient to the point of perfect 'readiness') does NOT become the enemy of the good. We have two excellent pulmonary clinical case studies, one adult and one paediatric, and on the prevention front Kenyon and Badri explore the role of concurrency in STI and HIV prevalence – watch this space: I think we will be hearing much more about multiple concurrent partnerships in Durban and beyond. Soul City is currently also launching their 'one love' campaign. Finally, a cheerful project report from Hofmeyr and colleagues on the Keiskamma AIDS Treatment programme in the Eastern Cape is a lesson on what can be done at primary community level to save lives and turn bad statistics around. Wishing you good reading and great conferencing!

LINDA-GAIL BEKKER

Editor

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE

You will, I hope, be reading this at or immediately after the Durban AIDS Conference, an extravaganza held every two years and hosted this year by the *Journal* editor, Professor Linda-Gail Bekker. A huge amount of work goes into these conferences, and we hope this one is a massive success. The Society, funded by a generous grant from MTN, is supporting the skills-building workshops.

The Free State antiretroviral crisis is still not over, but appears to be a microcosm for the rest of South Africa. Under-funding of the health system, appalling oversight by the previous Minister of Health and the South African cabinet, loss of health care staff and increasing costs of medical care have created multiple crises at various levels. Combined with a cholera outbreak that paradoxically has nothing to do with the Health Department and everything to do with crumbling municipal water infrastructure, things look grim for South Africa, especially when compared with some of its neighbours. Botswana boasts an antiretroviral programme that would be the envy of some developed world countries.

The Society asked its members to filter through any reports of rationing or drug stock-outs, triggering a deluge of e-mails, faxes and phone calls, not just from the Free State but from across the country. Reports of other stock-outs, as well as staff shortages, have been fed to the Department.



Dr Francois Venter (HIV Clinicians Society), Jonathan Berger (AIDS Law Project), Mark Heywood (ALP, South African National AIDS Council), Minister Barbara Hogan (Department of Health), Adila Hassan (ALP), and Professor Helen Rees (SANAC, Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit).

In late February our new Minister of Health, Barbara Hogan, met with members of the Society, the AIDS Law Project, the Treatment Action Campaign and the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) after we raised issues regarding the Free State problems. We were deeply impressed with her frankness and commitment, as well as the extent of her grasp of the problem. She has requested help in the form of reporting problems, and we are hoping to institute a more formal 'problem helpline' in the future.

The Minister needs help to fix the South African health care system. The Society is determined to give her whatever help we can.

FRANCOIS VENTER

President