

# Access to HIV Care Program

Breaking barriers as the first access program of its kind in Africa

## A Critical Time

In the late 1990s, the lack of access to HIV treatment in the developing world had reached a critical point. In Africa alone, the cost of providing life-saving therapies to every person living with HIV in sub-Saharan countries would have cost between 9% and 67% of the country's GDP<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, few countries had the industry to manufacture drugs locally, the money to import the treatment, even at a lower cost, or the healthcare infrastructure to manage large-scale treatment programs.

## A Step Forward in the Fight against AIDS

In this context, Abbott Laboratories brought Axios on board to develop and implement a program to increase access and affordability of their HIV therapies and tests in 69 least developed countries, including all of Africa. As a result, in March 2001, the *Access to HIV Care* access program was initiated.

The program made Norvir<sup>®</sup> (ritonavir), a HIV protease inhibitor used in combination with other antiretroviral therapies and Kaletra<sup>®</sup> (lopinavir/ritonavir), a second generation protease inhibitor that is a combination of lopinavir and ritonavir, available at a loss. In addition, Determine<sup>®</sup> HIV-1/2, an easy-to-use, rapid test for HIV antibodies that does not require instrumentation was also made available at a loss.

To drive uptake and local capacity in countries with limited healthcare infrastructure, the program was made available to any organization that provided

products to patients as part of a sound and sustainable program of care, including UN agencies, governments, employer groups, hospitals, pharmacies, private clinics and NGOs.

Axios was responsible for managing the application process and related supply chain, including assisting Abbott with the drug registration process by overseeing all import related issues. Axios also worked closely with local institutions to prevent drug diversion and to ensure that the drugs and tests were being properly dispensed to patients.

By offering Norvir<sup>®</sup>, Kaletra<sup>®</sup> and Determine<sup>®</sup> HIV-1/2 at a loss, the program allowed the company to build demand in unexplored markets. In addition, the program enabled both physicians and patients to have greater access to treatment choices beyond proprietary antiretrovirals (ARVs), while building diagnostic capacity at a critical time in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

## Setting the Foundation for Sustainability

Conceived before public donors began to play a key role in HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, the *Access to HIV Care* program was the first access program of its kind initiated in Africa and was successful in reaching more than 6 million patients through more than 250 implementing institutions across the globe.

Beyond facilitating access to HIV treatment and diagnostics, it also opened the doors for future treatment donation programs and helped to set the foundation for voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) efforts that would become central to the fight against HIV/AIDS in the coming years.

Prior to the program, Abbott had limited presence in Africa and in many of the other developing regions where the program operated. Today, through the local relationships that were built via the *Access to HIV Care* Program, Abbott maintains a strong presence in the region and continues to actively contribute to a number of global health issues via this strong network.

<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS, 1997 figures in BBC News: The drugs companies