U.S. Agency for International Development

Bureau for Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

USAID Begins Providing Anti-AIDS Drugs in Rwanda

ON FEBRUARY 28, 2003, four patients with HIV at the Biryogo Medical and Social Center became the first patients in Rwanda to receive antiretroviral therapy through a project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Two patients are widows in their forties caring for their own children as well as orphans from the 1994 war and genocide; one is a married woman who tested positive in 1995, and lives with her husband, who has had multiple partners, but has chosen not to learn his HIV status despite a recent test. None of these women can work because of HIV-related illnesses. The fourth woman is a 20-year-old unmarried student who aspires to be a laboratory technician and continue her education at university.

Distribution of antiretroviral medicines is a new effort by USAID and its contractor, Family Health International (FHI). USAID has established learning sites to introduce antiretroviral treatment in Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda. These introductory sites, which also provide counseling and psychosocial support, serve as models for antiretroviral treatment that governments and the private sector can expand to a national level.

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USAID will rapidly distill replicable lessons from these sites through analysis and cross-site comparisons and will use this knowledge to expand antiretroviral treatment to other settings in the world.

While the three introductory sites have been up and running for the past year, Rwanda was the first to actually dispense drugs. Before the drugs could be dispensed, however, Rwandan physicians needed training in HIV management, medical center staff needed to learn the fundamentals of antiretroviral therapy, patients required counseling on drug adherence regimens, and the medical center's laboratory equipment needed upgrades to permit ongoing patient monitoring.

Photo courtesy of Rob Ritzenthaler/Family Health International

Hospital staff oversee preparations for ART delivery at Kabgayi District Hospital.

In mid-2003, antiretroviral therapy was introduced at a second site in Rwanda, the Kabgayi District Hospital, and plans are underway to expand to a third site in Ruli.

These types of activities will expand rapidly as the President's Emergency AIDS Plan is implemented in the coming year. This new plan, announced in the 2003 State of the Union address, will provide $15 billion in funding over the next five years to treat two million HIV-infected people.

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1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC
20523-3600

www.usaid.gov