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SOUTH AFRICA

SUCCESS STORY

Clinic Gives Woman a Second Chance

Novel HIV care service is building the capacity of public, private sector



Photo: Right to Care Themba Lethu Clinic

Thanks to an antiretroviral drug treatment program and a supportive clinic staff, Nomsa now looks forward to re-entering the corporate world.

“ARVs gave me a second chance,” said Nomsa, who receives her medications from the Themba Lethu Clinic. “The clinic has always been staffed with incredible people.”

Telling Our Story
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Nomsa was diagnosed HIV positive in 1999. A doctor had suggested an HIV test after unsuccessful treatments on her swollen chest. She stopped visiting the hospital in 2000 after the doctor said she only had two years to live.

A year later, Nomsa learned about the Themba Lethu Clinic at Johannesburg’s Helen Joseph Hospital. Results from additional tests done there indicated her health was particularly endangered, prompting Mum Beauty, a volunteer counselor in the clinic from CARE (Community AIDS Response, a care and support non-governmental organization) to begin counseling and educating Nomsa about HIV, drug adherence, viral loads and CD4 counts.

Nomsa says everyone at Themba Lethu were very supportive, even when her former employer could no longer finance her treatment. Fortunately, the South African Government was starting at that time its public antiretroviral (ARV) drug rollout program, and she has been receiving treatment, care and support at this clinic ever since.

This innovative HIV care service builds public and private sector capacity to deliver safe, effective and affordable ARV therapy so that thousands more people living with HIV/AIDS can access treatment and improve their survival and productivity.

Hundreds of patients benefit weekly from the clinic, which was renovated from an old facility previously used for storage. More than 2,000 HIV-positive people have received care and support services since April 2004, and more than 1,400 people are on treatment. An average of 350 patients attend treatment readiness counseling prior to starting ARV therapy and 48,000 state condoms are distributed every month. The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has provided immeasurable assistance to the clinic through USAID for treatment and care.

Today Nomsa is self-employed and keen to rejoin the corporate world. She is a happy mother with a healthy CD4 count. “ARVs gave me a second chance,” she said. “The clinic has always been staffed with incredible people.”