

Massmart winning the fight against HIV and AIDS



With an estimated 11% or 5.7-million South Africans tested as HIV-positive, the impact of the disease is being felt in all aspects of South African life. What is concerning is that the prevalence of the disease is higher, roughly 18%, in people between the ages of 15 and 49. This means that the South African workforce is being adversely affected, both by the loss of expertise and skills and by absenteeism. Massmart has already taken bold steps in addressing this issue.

Massmart's comprehensive HIV/AIDS programme

Since 2001 Massmart has been proactively involved in the testing, counselling and education of its permanent employees. Massmart's programme is called Impilo and it has made steady progress in helping HIV-positive individuals. In 2005 Massmart began offering free HIV treatment not only to its employees, but also to the spouses of permanent employees. The programme incorporates medical care and HIV treatment by a doctor of the patient's choice, antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), vitamins, supplements and psychological counselling. Patients get their necessary medication delivered to an address of their choice in an efficient and confidential way. The response has been considerable and currently 87% of all permanent employees known to be HIV-positive are receiving treatment.

It is Massmart's goal that all HIV-positive employees accept the offer of free ARVs, but the stigma surrounding the disease has hampered these efforts. Some refuse to believe that they have the disease because they do not feel sick and others prefer to accept treatment from traditional healers. This has brought to the fore

the need for great discretion concerning a person's HIV status. It has also highlighted the need for more HIV education to dispel any myths surrounding the virus. The Impilo programme has made significant progress in addressing these matters. All test results are strictly confidential; even Massmart does not know who its HIV-positive employees are. And through the Impilo programme great care has been taken to emphasise this confidentiality to employees, as well as to educate them about the disease and its manageability. This is carried out through general information sessions, which are held before testing commences.

Recent advancements in the Impilo programme

Massmart's Impilo programme is not limited to HIV/AIDS. It has recently added a tuberculosis (TB) screening questionnaire to its list of wellness checks and includes preventative therapy for and treatment of TB. This is due to the higher risk HIV-positive individuals carry of being infected with TB. The wellness checks also include the testing of blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol and measuring Body Mass Index. This has been a way to work around the stigma surrounding the disease, as no one

needs to know which of the tests are being administered to a particular employee.

Employees have free access to post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). PEP medication is a regimen for those who have potentially been exposed to HIV, through, for example, a needle stick injury, or rape. This medication is most effective when taken within 72 hours after exposure. Employees also have access to prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) medication, which helps HIV-positive pregnant women keep their babies healthy. Between July 2010 and June 2011, no HIV-infected baby was reported as being born to a pregnant mother receiving PMTCT through the Impilo programme.

Impilo wellness champions have been appointed to help at various stores. These individuals are trained by Impilo and contribute



a great deal to the staff's education and awareness of HIV, in turn greatly improving the number of individuals who decide to be tested.

All permanent employees at Massmart have unlimited access to counselling sessions via a 24-hour toll-free hotline available in nine languages. Employees can also access medical advice from qualified medical professionals via this call centre. All information is recorded on an efficient platform called TherapyEdge™, which tracks the state of health of each patient. The call centre can also be contacted through SMS, by sending a 'please call me' or by sending an email.

Each staff member who accepts treatment on the Impilo programme is assigned a dedicated case manager and receives calls from the call centre at least once a month to discuss treatment and receive any counselling required. The outbound calls used to be made from 9am to 5pm, which presented a problem for Massmart employees, since they were not always able to take the call during normal working hours. The hours have since been adjusted to accommodate those who cannot be reached, by calling from 5pm to 9pm, Monday to Friday. This

has resulted in an increase in the number of people the call centre has been able to reach. Patients who are fully compliant with the programme also receive R30 airtime to contact the call centre if needed.

A lucky draw competition was held, where employees filled in their contact details and agreed to receive health messages via SMS. Each month a number of winners from across Massmart's formats won R1 000 each, resulting in about 3 000 employees updating their contact details. These details are then used to try and trace non-contactable employees in order to offer them the opportunity of receiving treatment.

Future plans for Impilo

Massmart is always looking for ways to improve and better the lives of its employees, and the group is considering many suggestions for the improvement of the programme. One idea has been to set up testing areas permanently on site so that employees can have their health checks conducted with less disruption to business. Suggestions have also been made for the education of the children of Massmart employees, making use of Marina Coleman's book

HIV & AIDS, as well as adding further screening tests to the Impilo programme. ■

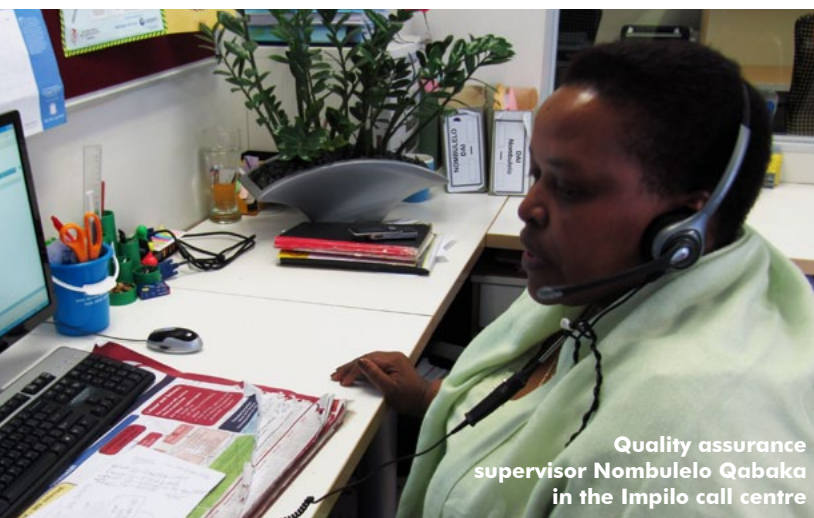


Anonymous comments from employees on the Impilo treatment programme

"It is a great programme that has made me live my life positive with no fear."
– Anonymous

"I have received the best support and guidance since joining. All my medication has been received on time, every time."
– Anonymous

"I know that I've got people to talk to when I need them. That really helps."
– Anonymous



Quality assurance supervisor Nombulelo Qabaka in the Impilo call centre



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