

**Relief.** The latest drug reduces the burden of swallowing multiple pills

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# Uganda to import new ARV launched in Kenya

KAMPALA. As Kenya launches a new effective Dolutegravir (DTG) anti-Aids drug, Uganda will start importing the same drug mid this month, starting with those patients who are resistant to the already existing first line drugs.

The Kenyan government on Wednesday rolled out a plan to invest KShs7.5b (Shs259b) annually on a local plant that will make the antiretroviral drugs following the country's partnership with Global Fund, and the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR).

Dr Joshua Musinguzi, the Aids Control Programme manager at the Ministry of Health, told *Sunday Monitor* that they want to observe the drug's effectiveness so that by the time pharmaceutical companies bring the fixed combination of the drug on market in 2018, they already have evidence-based data.

"At the moment, the drug is still a single combination pill which has to be taken together with another combination of Tenofovir and Lamivudine and we are trying to do away with multiple drugs because people do not want to take many tablets a day," Dr Musinguzi said.

He, however, could not state whether government or other funders would bankroll the new drug

and neither could he state how much it would cost.

Kenya's programme, Dr Musinguzi said, is the same arrangement under which Uganda and several other African countries are partnering with the Clinton Health Access Initiative and Unitaid, an International drug purchasing facility, to introduce the drug under the brand name Tivicay.

GlaxoSmithKline through ViiV Health care currently manufactures the drug.

Ms Stella Kentusi, the executive director of National Forum of People Living with HIV & Aids Networks in Uganda, a community-based organisation that supports people living with HIV/Aids, said they have been advocating for the same drug to be introduced in Uganda since it has lesser side effects.

"DTG comes as a much better version with the same efficacy and less side effects," Ms Kentusi said, adding that she hopes government makes it available as early as possible as opposed to next year.

She said the latest drug reduces the burden of swallowing multiple pills and also breaks the burden of patient being on one same treatment

for a long time. Mr Nevin Bradford, the chief executive officer of Cipla Quality Chemical Industries Limited (CQCI), which manufactures ARVs in Uganda, told *Sunday Monitor* that

## Dolutegravir

Dolutegravir is a prescription medicine for treatment of HIV infection in adults and children who weigh at least 66 pounds (30 kilograms). Dolutegravir is always used in combination with other HIV medicines.

Dolutegravir belongs to a class of HIV drugs called integrase inhibitors. Integrase inhibitors block an HIV enzyme called integrase. By blocking integrase, integrase inhibitors prevent HIV from multiplying and can reduce the amount of HIV in the body.

HIV medicines can't cure HIV/Aids, but taking a combination of HIV medicines every day helps people with HIV live longer, healthier lives. HIV medicines also reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

Source: US Department of Health

the company also has plans to roll out a new HIV/Aids drug.

"At the moment we don't manufacture the drug that was introduced in Kenya but it is under consideration," Mr Bradford said.

He added the CiplaQCI manufactures about six ARVs in different combinations.

Mr Emmanuel Katongole, a director at CiplaQCI, said the company is in the process of rolling out a triple-combination drug but he was quick to indicate that the currently manufactured drugs are still effective.

"According the Ministry of Health reports and guidelines, our first choice drug is still effective. So there is not yet a need for a new one," he added.

Mr Katongole said Kenya is likely to be the first country to introduce Dolutegravir on the African continent.

In 2004, Quality Chemicals Limited (QCL) convinced Indian drug maker Cipla to go into a joint venture with QCL and the government of Uganda to establish a pharmaceutical plant in Uganda. The factory was commissioned in 2007 with a capacity of six million pills daily.

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