

Joint Clinical Research Centre closes HIV project

BY CAROL KASUJJA

The Joint Clinical Research Centre, (JCRC) in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has closed a project on improving life for people living with HIV/AIDS.

JCRC, in partnership with USAID marked the successful completion of targeted HIV/AIDS and laboratory services (THALAS) Programme for people living with HIV on Friday at Hotel Africana, Kampala.

The seven-year project started in 2010 in collaboration with the health ministry, 13 regional referral and seven general hospitals. Its aim was to ensure the provision of quality HIV/AIDS care and treatment, laboratory, prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) and TB/HIV services within the public regional referral and district hospitals. It is also aimed at reducing mortality due to opportunistic infections among people living with

HIV and strengthening the technical capacity of public health labs and clinics.

A total of \$69 million was invested to make the project successful.

■ APPRECIATION

Speaking during the occasion, Michael Kabugo, the chief of party for USAID's THALAS project, said without USAID, the project would not have yield results.

"It has been a great opportunity to partner with USAID to improve the quality of life of people living with HIV. We were able to establish a clinic and laboratory network at our Lubowa clinic, which attracted more patients due to the comprehensive TB/HIV/AIDS services available. The new patients currently on ART have more than doubled, compared to 6,000 clients on ART before the project started," Kabugo said.

The JCRC Lubowa clinic currently has over 13,000 active patients on ART, with 742 being children.

Dr Cissy Kityo JCRC deputy executive director

She assured staff members and patients who were worried about the end of the project that they are now going to work with CDC to continue providing HIV care to Ugandans.

■ SERVICE DELIVERY

Kabugo also noted that the project contributed to the health ministry system strengthening through training and mentoring laboratory staff in 11 regional referral hospitals and 100 laboratory hubs.

"Ever since we started the project, our ICT infrastructure upgraded. This enabled JCRC staff to share information across the laboratory, clinic and finance department. Clinicians were able to order laboratory tests for patients. Test

order and lab results were available in the consulting room compared to the manual system that was in place in 2001, resulting in improved service delivery," Kabugo said.

In her speech, JCRC deputy executive director, Dr Cissy Kityo, thanked USAID for the support.

"Having resources does not automatically translate into successful implementation as we have seen with some projects. During the project, we continued to do research that has yielded results that revolutionised the way we treat HIV/AIDS today such as the Test and Treat new formulation for children that has been adopted by World Health Organisation," Kityo said

■ ASSURANCE

Kityo said staff members and patients who were worried about the end of the project that they are now going to work with the centre for disease control to continue providing HIV care to Ugandans.

In her remarks, the USAID acting deputy mission director, Laura Gonzales, said with the project support, Uganda is making strong progress towards achieving the UNAIDS 90-90-90 goals, which target that by 2020, 90% of all HIV-positive people will know their status, 90% of those diagnosed will be on treatment and 90% of those on treatment will have viral suppression.

"With this progress, an end to Uganda's HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030 is in sight. The project closeout is a key milestone in Uganda. I thank JCRC for ensuring that USAID funds are utilised well to provide critical, life- saving services," said Gonzales.

She appealed to the JCRC leadership to think of future challenges, which include identifying and treating men who have been difficult to engage and ensuring complete adherence to antiretroviral therapy so that those on treatment may live healthy without developing resistance to ARVs.