

Foundation for Professional Development and IMSA win major award for HIV campaign

The Pretoria-based Foundation for Professional Development (FPD) has won a major award for a campaign aimed at mass voluntary HIV counseling and testing. The campaign – called First Things First - was funded, planned and implemented by the FPD and Innovative Medicines South Africa (IMSA).

The campaign – directed at students at 18 public higher educational institutions across South Africa - was centered around a 30 minute DVD that highlighted the need for HIV testing and counseling. The campaign included flyers, banners, posters, T-shirts and give-away bags.

The 30 minute movie (produced by New Machine Productions) portrays stories in a student context and provides information on HIV risk, transmission, infection and life choices. The movie was shown before counseling and testing and each student received a copy. Copies were also distributed to residences.

On Tuesday 6 December the First Things First campaign won the award for the Best Mass Media intervention, campaign or production at the annual African Network for Strategic Communication in Health and Development (AfriComNet) awards ceremony held this year in Ethiopia.

The Awards recognize outstanding contributions made by individuals or organizations to strategic HIV and AIDS communication. The awards encourage innovation and quality in strategic communication and are aimed at enhancing the appreciation of strategic communication for effective health and development programmes. The awards further acknowledge campaigns that can be adapted elsewhere.

“The campaign came about in response to calls from government for more people to become involved in dealing with the AIDS epidemic in South Africa and government’s aim of having 15 million tested for HIV and counselled if needed,” says Ms Hanlie van der Merwe, Head of Department for Treatment, Care and Support at the FPD.

The campaign also aimed to take advantage of recent changes to South African legislation that allows for group pre-counseling and using the finger prick test. This means that larger groups can be counselled and tested quicker than before.

“As a trade association of 13 healthcare companies we saw this campaign as an opportunity to try something different and promote the value of healthcare innovation. We are extremely happy with the results and proud of the award it has won,” says Ms Val Beaumont, Executive Director at IMSA.

The First Things First campaign travelled around the country and an average of 222 students was tested daily from 14 February to 11 March. Close to 21 000 students with a mean age of 19 years were counseled and all but 529 were tested. One third of the students were first year students and twice as many females as males were tested.

During the campaign 315 out of the 20 953 students tested positive for HIV infection (1.5%) and were referred to healthcare facilities for further management and support. In addition, 15 668 students were screened for TB and 45 were referred for further investigation.

The campaign was targeted at South African university students with the hope that through the campaign perceptions around HIV could be changed. The universities also have existing initiatives, resources and infrastructure that could be used to provide support to those students who tested HIV positive.

Ms Van der Merwe says the campaign also aimed to change the behaviour of students a component of the campaign she believes has the greatest value.

“We want to create a wave of doing things differently - a new ‘pact’ between students entering the university who will soon become a peer group with a more confident and assertive approach towards HIV,” she says.

It’s for this reason that students who have been tested all sign a pledge wall with the following message on it:

“We, the class of 2011, pledge to know our status, to stop the HIV and AIDS stigma and to contribute to the struggle against HIV and AIDS.”

The FPD along with other United States President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) funder organisations provided and co-ordinated the mobile testing centres used on campuses.

The South African National Aids Council (SANAC) and the Department of Health advised on the scripting of the movie and supplied material used in the testing. Other partners included Troika and Redline who assisted in the creative mobilisation of the students,

All testing adhered to national requirements of voluntariness, confidentiality of data and respect for individuals.

The FPD and IMSA will receive a plaque recognising their achievement. No cash prize is awarded. To view the 30 minute movie as 3-part series via the FPD website visit www.foundation.co.za and follow the YouTube link.

Notes to Editors

About the Foundation for Professional Development

The Foundation for Professional Development (FPD) is a private higher educational institution based in Pretoria with satellite offices throughout South Africa. It was founded in 1997. Through various channels in the organisation, the FPD focuses on the three areas of higher educational scholarship: teaching and learning, research and community engagement. To date, the FPD has provided training to over 160 000 students at low or no cost to the students and currently has over 150 000 patients active on ART. The FPD’s vision is to build a better society through education and capacity development. For more information on the FPD visit www.foundation.co.za

About Innovation Medicines South Africa (IMSA)

Innovation Medicines South Africa (IMSA) is a South African pharmaceutical industry association promoting the value of medicine innovation in healthcare. It was founded in 2003. IMSA represents manufacturers of originator medicines: Fresenius Kabi, GE Healthcare, Genzyme, Lilly, MSD, Norgine, Novartis, Nycomed, Pfizer, Roche, Sanofi-aventis, Bristol-Myers Squibb.

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