

## **No economic argument for stalling drug programme**

By Jo-Anne Smetherham

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Durban: A University of Cape Town study has confirmed that there is no economic argument for stalling a national Aids drug treatment programme.

Work by Health Economics Unit researchers **Susan Cleary** and Andrew Boulle has shown that it is slightly more expensive to treat HIV-positive people with antiretroviral drugs than to treat them as they fall ill at clinics and hospitals - but that the extra cost is not significant.

This also does not take into account the costs to society, including that of large numbers of Aids orphans and the loss of workers.

"There is no economic argument for not providing antiretroviral treatment. If we continue with this pattern in South Africa, we need to acknowledge that it is not for economic reasons," said **Cleary**, speaking at the Aids conference here yesterday.

The research confirms the results of recent work done by UCT economists Nicoli Nattrass, Nathan Geffen and Chris Raubenheimer, who found that it would cost an extra R400 million in 2005 not to give anti-retrovirals and R700m by 2008.

**Cleary** and Boulle's study found that antiretrovirals would cost R8 320 per year of life and other costs would amount to R6 770.

In another development, a nationwide attempt to procure antiretroviral generics for SA was announced at the conference. The generic antiretroviral procurement project (GAARP) is an association of 19 projects already providing treatment.

GAARP aims to improve access to treatment through the promotion of generic drugs of good quality and of the lowest possible price. - Health Writer

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