



THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

The Ministry of Health Announces Public-Private Partnership to Get to Zero Deaths from Cryptococcal Meningitis in Eswatini

Eswatini, February 1, 2023 – The Eswatini Ministry of Health is pleased to announce the intent to enter into a public-private partnership with the Mycotic Diseases Branch (MDB) at US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Gilead Sciences, and Integral Global Consulting (IGC), and the Georgetown University Center for Global Health Practice and Impact (GU CGHPI) to reduce deaths from HIV-associated Cryptococcal Meningitis (CM), a fungal infection affecting the brain and spinal cord. This public private partnership will bring together government, non-governmental, and private industry partners to achieve effective treatment of CM as part of routine HIV programming to reduce CM deaths in Eswatini.

CM is one of the leading causes of death for people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. While diagnostic tests and medicines for prevention and treatment exist, access is limited, especially in rural health facilities, which contributes to high mortality rates in Africa.

“We are proud to step up our commitment to addressing advanced HIV disease (AHD) and welcome this public-private partnership which has the potential to transform the way people have access to CM treatment and care in Eswatini,” said Dr Simon Zwane, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Health in Eswatini. “By working together with our partners and our communities, we strongly believe we can get to zero CM deaths from cryptococcal meningitis by 2030.”

The ‘Getting to Zero CM Deaths’ program will be implemented in three phases. The first phase is focused on identifying current gaps in management of CM and will be carried out with assistance from the Georgetown University CGHPI and Integral Global Consulting. In collaboration with PEPFAR, Global Fund, and other partners, the subsequent phases will implement and evaluate programmes to reduce deaths from CM while contributing to improved quality of AHD care in Eswatini.

“Tackling advanced HIV disease (AHD) is a critical component of ending the HIV epidemic for everyone, everywhere, and must include sustained investment in the healthcare system, including at local level, to ensure a lasting impact on communities. This partnership will demonstrate Gilead’s commitment to identifying and implementing solutions that address barriers in the healthcare ecosystem, in line with country policy in Eswatini. An important part of ending the HIV epidemic includes addressing mortality from AHD, and we hope that outcomes from this collaboration will inform implementation and future scale up,” said Johanna Mercier, Chief Commercial Officer at Gilead Sciences.

CDC serves as technical advisor in this project and provides support and training for diagnosis and treatment of CM. Dr Tom Chiller, MD, MPH, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mycotic Disease Branch said: “Collaborating with partners remains critical to improve access to cryptococcal diagnostics and antifungal drugs. CDC has invested considerable resources in developing training materials to help educate healthcare professionals and patients about the diagnosis, management, and prevention of cryptococcal disease. As we implement such programs across the African continent, CDC can also help provide customised resources on training and case studies for cryptococcal infection management.”



THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

Note to Editors:

Target Audience: Global community

Dissemination: Letter published on government website, adapted press release for local news below

About Cryptococcal Meningitis (CM)

Cryptococcal Meningitis (CM) is one of the main causes of death for people living with HIV (PLHIV) in sub-Saharan Africa (Lawrence et al., 2018). It causes about 15% of HIV-associated death worldwide, 75% of these death occurring in sub-Saharan Africa (Avert, 2020). The mortality rate of patients with HIV-associated CM in low- and middle-income countries is estimated to range from 40-70% (Rajasingham, 2017).

A newly formed initiative, *End Cryptococcal Meningitis Death by 2030*, provides an important framework for countries that are committed to improving national capacity to reduce cryptococcal meningitis deaths.

About Eswatini Ministry of Health

The Eswatini Health Ministry seeks to improve the health status of the people of Eswatini by providing preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative services that are of high quality, relevant, accessible, affordable, equitable and socially acceptable.

About Gilead Sciences

Gilead Sciences is a biopharmaceutical company that has pursued and achieved breakthroughs in medicine for more than three decades, with the goal of creating a healthier world for all people. The company is committed to advancing innovative medicines to prevent and treat life-threatening diseases. Gilead operates in more than 35 countries worldwide, with headquarters in Foster City, California.

About CDC

The Mycotic Diseases Branch is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) lead group for preventing illness and death from fungal diseases in the United States and throughout the world.

About PEPFAR

The US Government, through President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), provides financial and technical assistance for prevention, care and treatment of HIV in more than 50 countries. PEPFAR Eswatini implementing partners support host country programs to diagnose and treat HIV associated infections such as CM as a component of comprehensive HIV service delivery.

About IGC

Integral Global Consulting (IGC) collaborates directly with ministries of health and in-country partners to expand the reach and effectiveness of federal agencies and international organizations in



THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

hard-to-reach areas, delivering sustainable public health impacts to vulnerable communities throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. IGC specializes in relationship-building and ground-level operations to rapidly and effectively mobilize resources to achieve our clients' goals.

About Georgetown University

Georgetown University is a research university in Washington, D.C. Its Center for Global Health Practice and Impact (GU CGHPI) serves countries to sustainably improve their population's health and wellbeing and, with funding by PEPFAR, has been implementing collaborative projects with the Ministry of Health in Eswatini since 2018 with focus on HIV and TB epidemic control.

For Eswatini Press (Target audience: general public)

The Eswatini Ministry of Health shall partner with pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, the Mycotic Diseases Branch at US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Integral Global to reduce deaths caused by cryptococcal meningitis. Cryptococcal meningitis is a fungal infection affecting the brain and spinal cord. It is the second leading cause of death amongst people living with HIV. This two-year partnership (*Getting to Zero CM Deaths*) would use additional expertise and resources from the non-governmental and private sectors to complement ongoing government efforts in diagnosing and managing cryptococcal meningitis.