

WHO's antiretroviral guidelines discussed

WHO's recently launched guidelines for the treatment of patients with AIDS in resource-poor settings* form part of a broad response to the HIV pandemic, and '*propose an innovative approach to scaling up ARV [antiretroviral] use in developing country settings*', say researchers from Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons, US, and the WHO, Switzerland. They note that, although efforts directed at the prevention of HIV infection, including vaccine development, are '*crucial priorities*' that depend on increased and sustained funding, there is now an '*unprecedented*' mobilisation to treat HIV-infected individuals worldwide, mainly through the provision of antiretroviral therapy.

The researchers say that this is '*really the first time*' that WHO has called for such antiretroviral programmes to be implemented, and highlight several factors which have contributed to the guidelines' feasibility:

- a decrease in the price of antiretrovirals in developing countries
- the advent of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis & Malaria, which will make funding of the drugs possible
- the inclusion of antiretrovirals on WHO's Essential Drug List in April this year.

The need for guidance on the rational use of antiretroviral drugs in resource-poor settings has increased on a large scale due to these changes, say the researchers. They add that a defined treatment programme is the '*most feasible and responsible way to introduce ARVs to maximise the benefits for patients and reduce the likelihood of harm arising from resistance*'. The field of antiretroviral therapy is rapidly evolving, and recommendations on the rational use of antiretrovirals in resource-poor settings will be reviewed and updated regularly to '*reflect scientific and political progress*', they conclude.

* see Pharmacoeconomics & Outcomes News 372: 2, 20 Jul 2002; 809007147

Hammer SM, et al. Antiretroviral guidelines for resource-limited settings: the WHO's public health approach. *Nature Medicine* 8: 649-650, Jul 2002 80901101