

## SPECIAL PERMISSION GRANTED TO IMPORT TB MEDICATION

## MSF win right to use generic drug

Laura Lopez Gonzalez  
Health-e News Service

THE Medicines Control Council (MCC) has granted humanitarian group Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) access to a cheaper drug to treat extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB).

The MCC's decision is the conclusion of a three-year battle for MSF and comes a few weeks after the MSF lodged a high court case against the MCC. This followed the regulatory body's failure to convene a statutory committee to allow MSF to appeal against the MCC's December decision bar-

ring it from procuring cheaper XDR-TB treatment.

Multidrug-resistant (MDR) TB is resistant to both commonly used anti-TB drugs while XDR-TB is resistant to these drugs as well as at least half of the mostly commonly used second-line drugs.

MSF announced yesterday that the MCC has now granted it special Section 21 permission to import generic linezolid from the Indian generic medicine producer Hetero Drugs. Such an approval allows MSF to use a medicine not yet registered for use in South Africa for a short period.

At more than R700 a daily

pill, the XDR-TB drug linezolid remains out of reach for most South African patients but the generics MSF procures cost about R80 a pill for its patients.

In its MCC application, MSF was able to successfully argue that the brand name drug's high cost was a barrier to the realisation of South Africans' right to health.

MSF has withdrawn its court case against the MCC, according to MSF Access Campaign advocacy officer Julia Hill. The humanitarian organisation has been battling to provide patients with cheaper medication since it began treating drug-resistant TB patients

in Khayelitsha in August 2011.

Hetero Drug's generic version of linezolid is used globally by programmes financed by The Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB and Malaria and has also been approved by the UK's MCC equivalent, the Medicines and Health-care products Regulatory Agency, Hill adds.

Hill added that Hetero's application to register generic linezolid in South Africa has been with the MCC for at least a year. Under the MCC's recent decision, MSF will only be allowed to import generic linezolid for use in its Khayelitsha drug-resistant TB projects but Hill says the decision may pave the way for simi-

lar Section 21 requests.

"The MSF Section 21 application was filed based on the unaffordability of the registered Pfizer product," Hill says.

"If our application is ultimately successful, there is nothing to stop other qualified actors – including the national Department of Health – from filing a similar application in order to expand access to this medication across South Africa for TB patients who need it."

Hill added that the MCC will continue to hear similar appeals until the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) finalises its long-awaited and much delayed policy on intel-

lectual property.

"Before the elections, we were told by the DTI that they had assembled an interdepartmental task team," Hill says.

"The process doesn't seem to be moving forward even though we've heard it was a priority from the Minister of Health, the ANC, the DA and the DTI."

Meanwhile, the MCC has also fast-tracked the MDR-TB drug bedaquiline. Bedaquiline is the first novel anti-TB drug created in the last 40 years and is being used on a small scale in the country through a clinical access programme, which has produced promising results.

## Horses help youth turn their lives around

Brenton Geach

A BOY of about nine years old walks confidently up to Starlight and engages with the horse, stroking its long neck.

He slowly leads the horse around the paddock.

Despite his young age, the boy looks after his younger sister as their parents can no longer look after them.

They live at Homes to Grow, a children's home in Masi-phumelele and he is participating in a programme run by the Equinox Trust where interaction with horses is used to empower people.

The Equinox Trust is a non-profit organisation working with people from orphanages, foster homes and abused women shelters to try to change their negative behavioural patterns. The programme offers "empowerment and support programmes to communities in need through interaction with horses".

When the boy was introduced to horses, he was scared and did not want to go near them, but after a few meetings he became confident, approaching a horse on his own. When asked, he said he would like to ride one day, but not yet. The children's names have been withheld to protect their privacy.

Nicola Michl-Johnston, a facilitator for the equine-assisted programme, shared the stories of some of the youths who have seen positive change in their lives through their experiences with the horses. "The horses help to empower individuals to change their feelings and attitudes towards their circumstances, in order for them to adopt appropriate ways to manage and create positive lives for themselves," she explained.

A girl, who comes from a troubled background and has shut herself off from the world, has learned to trust and how to cope with her fears thanks to her time with the horses.

Michl-Johnston said the girl was "brought out of her shell" with the help of a horse who restored her self-esteem and confidence by patiently standing by her side.

Another young woman, a



A BOY AND HIS HORSE: Starlight the horse is part of a process where people learn to change their negative behavioural patterns by interacting with horses. Picture: BRENTON GEACH

victim of violent circumstances, learned to combat feelings of negativity through "patience, forgiveness and determination".

"It taught her to label what she feels in a situation and that she can choose how to respond and react," Michl-Johnston said.

The Equinox Trust programme consists of a team consisting of "horses, a mental health professional and a

horse expert", who facilitate a process where clients interact with horses and are asked to work through tasks for which they must earn the trust of the horses. They do not ride the horses, but rather interact with them on foot.

"Working professionally in the field for the past five years, we have experienced how the powerful interactions between horses and humans have encouraged journeys of posi-

tive change within individuals," said Michl-Johnston.

She added that horses communicate non-verbally which makes them experts in body language. People learn their behaviour which has a direct impact on their surroundings and when a horse is calm, they will happily follow you. This is a skill that can be applied to any social interaction.

"When we start interacting with horses, they respond and

react to what we are communicating non-verbally too. The horse therefore becomes our direct mirror," she said.

Facilitators observe the behaviour of the horses and the clients during their interactions and from that they can make "metaphorical links to their lives" which can help create awareness and the potential for change.

For details e-mail info@equinoxtrust.org

## Battle over, now Belhar houses to get built

Jason Felix

FOLLOWING a three-year battle with two universities, the city can finally set plans into motion for its R34 million housing project in Belhar, with construction set to begin at the end of the year.

The Belhar-Pentech Housing Project came under heavy scrutiny from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC), who wanted the land for recreational purposes and student housing.

Mayoral committee member for human settlements James Slabbert said it was one of many new housing projects the city had in the pipeline for the new financial year.

Ward councillor Willie Jaftha, who has been driving the project since 2003, said CPUT and UWC had to be included in the public participation process.

"They opposed it for three years. We sent out a notification to stating our intention to build houses. The community was overjoyed with the project because they would benefit from it and the open land in the area would be utilised for a purpose other than drugs and dumping."

"We held countless meetings with both universities and every time they told us that they wanted it for sports fields and student houses. The needs of the community override the needs of a university. They have all the facilities they need."

The project comprises 340 single-storey Breaking New Ground subsidised houses. Of the homes, 324 will be semi-detached houses on 120 m<sup>2</sup> plots.

The remainder of the homes will be situated on 200m<sup>2</sup> plots and homes will have two bedrooms.

The homes have also been designed to enable the beneficiaries to extend their homes.

So far 177 beneficiaries have been approved and more have been invited for screening.

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## briefs

## Promise on Derby-Lewis appeal

The Correctional Services Department has promised to give convicted killer Clive Derby-Lewis's application for medical parole urgent attention.

Derby-Lewis's lawyer, Elsabe Juin, said yesterday she was told by department officials the application would be marked urgent and be treated as a priority.

Derby-Lewis was convicted of conspiracy to kill SA Communist Party general secretary Chris Hani by providing the gun Polish immigrant Janusz Walus used to kill him in the driveway of his Boksburg, East Rand, home on April 10, 1993.

## Input sought on rhino horn idea

Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa yesterday asked for input on talks about the possibility of legalising the rhino horn trade.

"Stakeholders are invited to indicate whether they would like to make representations to the panel. Their inputs will be considered in formulating recommendations to government, on an appropriate position on the legalisation of rhino horn trade," the department said in a statement.

A panel of 10 experts was established to help an inter-ministerial committee with its investigation. It was expected to report to the committee by the end of the year.

Since January 496 rhino had been poached in South Africa.

## Top blesbok fetches seven million

A game breeder paid R7.8 million for an exotic Saddleback blesbok, Beeld reported yesterday.

The brown and white blesbok, named Top Deck, stole the limelight at the 13th Absa Kirkwood Wildlife Festival when Gamevest owner Phillip Mostert bought him.

Top Deck's brother, Mnumzane, was reportedly sold for R4.2m in May during an auction in Limpopo.

A blesbok usually costs between R1 500 and R2 000.

## Land claimants get five more years to lodge cases



JACOB ZUMA

President Jacob Zuma has signed the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Bill into law, his office said yesterday.

The legislation notably re-opens the restitution claims process that closed at the end of 1998 and gives claimants five years – June 30, 2019 – to lodge land claims.

Only some 80 000 land restitution claims were lodged by the 1998 deadline and it is estimated that there are up to five times as many valid cases that can be brought by victims of apartheid-era forced removals.

The legislation also regulates the appointment and service conditions of judges of the Land Claims Court.

## Police seek murder suspect

Gauteng police were yesterday searching for a Soweto radio station employee who they suspect stabbed and killed his 32-year-old girlfriend.

Police said the woman was stabbed several times and locked into a flat in Jabulani on Sunday.

"The man then phoned the girl's friend and told her he killed the woman," said Warrant Officer Kay Makhubela. Jozi FM station manager Mpho Mhlongo said they did not know the man's whereabouts and called on him to hand himself in.

## 'Scrap chicken tariff plan'

Anti-dumping tariffs on certain chicken cuts were unnecessary, the Association of Meat Importers and Exporters said yesterday.

Local producers had appealed to the government to apply anti-dumping duties on certain cuts from Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands, CEO David Wolpert said in a statement.

The International Trade Administration Commission started investigating the matter in October.

The exercise was "nothing more than another attack on a relatively small import industry representing less than 10 percent of the chicken market" to boost prices, Wolpert said.

## Two get life sentences for rape

Two men were sentenced to life in prison for gang rapes and robberies by the High Court sitting in the Kroonstad Magistrate's Court yesterday, Free State police said.

The third accused, a minor, was given a suspended sentence of eight years, said spokesman Captain Stephen Thakeng.

"Five women, aged between 16 and 20, were gang-raped and robbed in separate incidents," said Thakeng.

Judge Shamin Ebrahim handed down four life sentences to Rammokgo Hendrik Tsotsotso for the crimes, while Mkhize Peter Mosotho was handed three life sentences.

The crimes were committed during 2012 and 2013 in Rammulotsi, Viljoenskroon.

The three took turns raping the women, then robbed them.

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