

## Communities respond well to Tutu Tester

A brightly coloured van is drawing the crowds for health screening.

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For the past three months the Tutu Tester - a brightly painted red, green, blue and yellow mobile clinic for quick testing for hypertension, diabetes and HIV - has been seen at taxi ranks, church grounds and shopping centres in five township areas in Cape Town with a steady flow of people making use of the opportunity to check their status regarding these conditions free of charge.

The Tutu Tester vehicle and CD4 machine used for the testing are sponsored by Metropolitan Holdings, its medical scheme administrator Metropolitan Health Group and Qualsa, its managed care subsidiary, in co-operation with the Desmond Tutu HIV/Aids Foundation (DTHF).

As many as 45% of those making use of the opportunity were testing for the first time, indicating that the Tutu Tester pilot project is achieving success in promoting awareness about the need for people to make regular testing part of their health maintenance programme.

The results after three months show that of the 1706 people tested, 58% were men. Of those who tested positive for HIV, 59% were men.

According to Dr Nienke van Schaik, who heads up the pilot testing project on behalf of DTHF, the results are not representative of HIV infection levels prevalent in society as a whole, as the majority of people tested were found to be HIV-negative. This is probably because people come in to test on the spur of the moment and not because they feel sick or suspect that they might be infected.

She explains that the main purpose is to offer HIV testing outside of the traditional clinical setting to make it accessible to people who are otherwise difficult to reach. In this way the Tutu Tester promotes disease prevention as a self-initiated activity.

“We work with each individual through a risk reduction questionnaire. Depending on their responses, they are given guidelines for an appropriate risk reduction programme of which regular annual testing forms a part.”

Although antiretroviral treatment is not provided by the mobile clinic to those who do test positive, they are referred to their nearest health care provider able to do so.

Mandla Mvelase, Metropolitan General Manager: Group Marketing & Corporate Affairs says that the company shares the Tutu Foundation's vision that HIV should become viewed as a chronic treatable condition rather than one attached to stigma, discrimination and shame.

“The Tutu Tester brings testing and education to the people. Our focus is to spread the message of what people can do individually, what groups can do and what communities can do to enlighten and empower people to manage their health,” Mvelase said.

Mvelase would like to build on the success of the pilot in Masiphumelele, Nyanga, Simon's Town, Kalk Bay and Crossroads, through collaboration with other institutions and organisations sharing the same objective

This fits in with Metropolitan's vision that collaboration and partnerships are critical if the country wants to head towards a 'Summer for All People' scenario, as predicted in the Metropolitan Live the Future 2025 model.

The Tutu Tester is one of several HIV/AIDS projects which Metropolitan supports. Other initiatives include Red Ribbon, a HIV/AIDS information portal; Positive Health, a free information booklet and Humana People to People in Gauteng, that offers testing, counselling and educational programmes in Soweto.

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