

S.Africa conducts trials for shorter TB treatment

March 30 2012

South African researchers said Friday they were conducting medical trials to shorten the duration of tuberculosis treatment to make it easier for patients to complete the full regimen.

"Fighting tuberculosis is going to require new strategies. The ongoing trial aimed at reducing the treatment period from six to four months is one of the new strategies of fighting the disease," said Gavin Churchyard, chief executive of Aurum Institute, an independent medical research body.

"South Africa has the highest burden of TB infections (in the world), therefore it is important to position ourselves in the forefront of new research to help stop the disease," he said.

The trials are conducted at the TB Research Centre, based at a public hospital in Tembisa township east of Johannesburg, one of the areas with the highest infection rates.

Aurum has also partnered with the French [pharmaceutical firm](#) Sanofi to increase research capacity in various TB initiatives.

"No organisation can work alone to make a meaningful contribution towards eliminating the disease," said Christopher Viehbacher, chief executive of Sanofi.

"The long period of treatment has been identified as one of the reasons

for poor adherence, resulting in drug resistant [TB strains](#), which are more expensive to treat," he said.

This month, TB Alliance in Washington unveiled plans for the first clinical tests of a new [treatment regimen](#) for tuberculosis that could shorten treatment times to four months in both patients with TB and some forms of drug-resistant TB.

Many [TB patients](#) fail to complete treatment because they cannot tolerate the difficult side effects of the medications or cannot adhere to the long-term treatment, according to the TB Alliance.

This leads to drug resistant forms of the disease, or even extensively [drug-resistant TB](#) known as XDR-TB.

A total of 8.8 million people worldwide fell ill with the contagious lung disease in 2010 and around 1.4 million died, according to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO).

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Citation: S.Africa conducts trials for shorter TB treatment (2012, March 30) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-03-safrica-trials-shorter-tb-treatment.html>

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