

**iOL**  
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SEARCH GO >>

NEWS

Front Page

South Africa

Politics

Crime & Courts

Education

Health

ADVERTISE

**South Africa**

Will Dr No say yes to Wits breakthrough?

April 14 2002 at 08:11PM

**The Star**

By Lynne Altenroxel

A Wits University researcher has discovered a new way of measuring the immunity of HIV-positive patients - a breakthrough which finally makes the crucial CD4 blood test affordable in poor countries. The new method is more accurate than existing techniques. The breakthrough has earned its discoverer, Wits haematologist *Dr Debbie Glencross*, accolade from the world's leading health organisations and has been welcomed by South African Aids activists. It offers new hope to HIV patients who need anti-retrovirals because the prohibitive cost of existing CD4 tests (R358 is the medical aid rate), which are done every three months for patients on triple therapy, dramatically increases the price of chronic treatment.

As SA moves to offer an anti-retroviral drug to HIV-positive, pregnant women, the emergence of a relatively cheap CD4 test could help to cut the cost of treating people with the disease. Other developing countries, like Botswana, have decided to offer anti-retroviral drugs to anyone living with HIV, but South Africa has yet to do so.

The cost of the tests has been a major argument against the provision of free triple therapy - even though public pressure has seen the price of the drugs drop from about R4 500 to R700 a month. The new method will cost the government just R82 per test - less than a third of current prices. At Johannesburg Hospital, between 3000 and 4000 CD4 tests are done each month.

**NEWS**

THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT  
APRIL 28 2002

**PIONEER**



An overwhelmed Dr. Debbie Glencross is lauded at Witwatersrand Medical School, Johannesburg, SA, by admirers from the International Marketing Council's *"Believing in South Africa"* campaign. Glencross's cheaper CD4 test to measure the immunity levels of people living with AIDS has won world recognition.

## Mbeki realises the cost of his Aids policy

April 20 2002 at 06:58PM

THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT



By John Battersby

The breakthrough that led to the government's about-turn this week on using anti-retroviral drugs to combat HIV/Aids came at a cabinet committee meeting in mid-January, sources said this week. It was at that meeting, they said, that Mbeki finally accepted that negative perceptions of the country's HIV/Aids policies were not just a matter of miscommunication of the government's message, but rather a lack of consensus within the government about what the message was.

During the January discussion, Mbeki suggested a comprehensive cabinet meeting be held in mid-April on the issue of HIV/Aids policy to reach a clear agreement on what the policy was so that it could then be clearly communicated at home and abroad. At this week's marathon cabinet meeting, which was the first comprehensive discussion on HIV/Aids policy at cabinet level, there were robust exchanges. Buthelezi, the home affairs minister, emerged as one of the heroes of the day. The breakthrough came with the acceptance by Mbeki and the cabinet that the HIV/Aids policy was no longer merely a medical and scientific matter but had become a major issue of public policy that was undermining South Africa's interests.

Also by [Lynne Altenroxel, Cape Times \(South Africa\): April 22 2002.](#)

### **Mandela 'delighted' by Mbeki's shift on Aids**

Mandela believes the surprise change will make South Africans realise what a brilliant president Thabo Mbeki is. For more than 2 years Mbeki has faced international condemnation for his dealings with Aids dissidents, who believe HIV does not cause Aids and that anti-retrovirals are deadly. The government has also come under fire for refusing to provide anti-retrovirals for rape survivors and HIV-positive pregnant women. The cabinet meeting last Wednesday marked a change. In a statement after the meeting, the government acknowledged that anti-retrovirals were effective. It said it was developing a plan to make them available to pregnant women who needed them and that anti-retrovirals would be provided for rape survivors. Mandela expressed his delight publicly at an event at the hospital at which Aventis Pharma announced to contribute R150-million to the campaign against tuberculosis.