MORE NEWS ON PHARMACEUTICALS

HIV vaccine trial fails

In February scientists halted a large SA trial testing an experimental shot, after a routine review found it does not work. The HVTN 702 trial, (funded by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), began in 2016, testing a shot modified to tackle the dominant strain of HIV circulating in SA, clade C.

But a routine, interim review of the HVTN 702 study conducted by an independent data safety monitoring board in January, found the experimental shot did not provide any protection against HIV. lubricant, and free pre-exposure prophylaxis.

Safety concerns delay new HIV drug

The DoH has asked the SA Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) to review its requirements for a cheaper pill (containing dolutegravir) for HIV patients. According to the DOH's acting director-general, Anban Pillay, there has been a reluctance by prescribers and female patients to sign a form to access TLD [the new pill, which contains tenofovir, lamivudine and dolutegravir]. Successful implementation of the new treatment is crucial for the DoH, because it will save money as well as assure key donors such as the US Presidential Plan for AIDS Relief (Pepfar) that it is making progress in bringing the HIV epidemic under control, reported ***Business Day*** (27 February 2020).

TB detection boost

In February a new breakthrough in detecting tuberculosis (TB) was announced by researchers at the Universities of Pretoria (UP) and Leicester in the UK who invented a 3-D-printed insert. The inserts catch and retain live tuberculosis bacteria after people, who may be infected, have worn the adapted mask for just 30 minutes. The trial showed 86.5% of the patients testing positive for TB through the use of the mask, and only 20.5% from sputum - despite all patients being positively tested for TB through sputum at the start, reported ***Cape Times*** (20 February)

Cancer drug delays 'costing lives'

According to Cancer Alliance's Salomé Meyer, project manager for the Access to Medicine Campaign, lenalidomide (Revlimid) is one of thousands of lifesaving drugs awaiting approval at the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA). SAHPRA spokesperson Yuven Gounden said the backlog was a result of "inadequate funding, staffing, lack of expertise and cumbersome processes".

The authority inherited 16 000 applications from its predecessor, the Medicines Control Council. Gounden said that to date, the backlog of applications has been reduced by 46%. Industry players said SAHPRA was dogged by the same staff shortages and lack of expertise that affected its predecessor.