



UNICEF/BAYLOR AGREEMENT SIGNALS BRIGHTER OUTLOOK FOR PEDIATRIC AIDS TREATMENT IN AFRICA

NAIROBI -- Feb. 28, 2006 -- The UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa and the Baylor College of Medicine International Pediatric AIDS Initiative (BIPAI) signed an agreement today to work together to improve access to antiretrovirals and other treatments for children living with HIV/AIDS in the region.

Per Engebak, UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa and Michael B. Mizwa, Vice President, International Affairs, of Baylor's Pediatric AIDS Initiative signed on behalf of the two organizations.

"This collaboration is good news for children living with HIV and AIDS in the countries of this region, where far too many still don't receive the care and treatment they need," said UNICEF Regional Director Per Engebak. "It marks a step forward in the Global Campaign on Children and AIDS, which was launched last year specifically to encourage collaborative efforts such as this one to prevent children from becoming infected with HIV and to improve treatment, care and support for children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS."

Some 2.3 million children are living with HIV and more than 5 million have died from the pandemic so far, most of them in Africa. ARTs (antiretroviral therapies) have only recently become available to greater numbers of people in Africa, but children remain often undiagnosed and underserved. Pediatric formulations of most ARTs are not readily available and health care providers throughout the region lack training in treating children for AIDS. Far too few children receive even low-cost antibiotics to prevent or treat the common opportunistic infections they often endure. The new collaboration between Baylor and UNICEF is heralded as a critical step in transforming pediatric AIDS treatment in the region.

"This new partnership will help Baylor and UNICEF catalyze expanded access to treatment for HIV-infected children and families across 20 countries of Eastern and Southern Africa," said Mizwa. "These countries are the hardest hit by HIV/AIDS compared to any others on the face of the globe."

The Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative at Texas Children's Hospital is headed by Dr. Mark W. Kline, professor of pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine.

"Baylor and UNICEF have shared missions and objectives and our activities across Africa complement one another," said Kline.

The Baylor initiative dates from 1996 and is a pioneering effort to bring together prevention measures, care, treatment, research and health professional education for children and families affected by HIV/AIDS. One of the most distinctive elements of Baylor's approach is its network of Children's Clinical Centers of Excellence in operation now for two years. Six such centers are functional in Africa, providing children and families access to comprehensive HIV/AIDS care and treatment and serving as a training ground for health professionals at the same time. Baylor centers of excellence are also found in Eastern Europe and are planned in other areas of the world, including Asia.

More recently, Baylor initiated the Baylor Pediatric AIDS Corps, a program that puts doctors on the ground in Africa to treat and train health care workers across southern Africa.

Baylor College of Medicine, founded in 1900, is one of the leading academic medical institutions in the United States, ranking 11th among 125 U.S. medical schools for research funding from the National Institutes of Health. Each year it trains more than 3,000 medical, graduate and allied health students, as well as residents and fellows.

UNICEF has been the world's leader for children for 60 years, working on the ground in 157 countries to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for poor countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence and exploitation. A critical area of focus, particularly in eastern and southern Africa, is on HIV and AIDS, which is reversing decades of progress in reducing infant and child mortality in a number of countries in the region.

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