

Lori Williams
713-798-4710
loriw@bcm.edu
www.bcm.edu

Satellite pediatric AIDS clinics will blanket small country in Africa

HOUSTON – (May 1, 2008) -- Lesotho, one of the countries hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic, soon will be the first country in Africa offering state-of-the-art HIV/AIDS facilities, care and treatment to children and families living in every district.

Through a partnership with the government of Lesotho, construction began this week on the first of 10 satellite clinics in remote areas of the country, as part of the Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative. The satellite clinics will reinforce the work of BIPAI's state-of-the-art center of excellence in Lesotho's capital of Maseru.

"A child in Lesotho, no matter where he lives, no matter how remote the village, will have access to state-of-the-art HIV care," said Dr. Mark Kline, BIPAI president. "This is something very special for this country and a sign of what can be accomplished by working in collaboration."

Prime Minister Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili and members of his Cabinet joined 3,000 people for a "sod-turning" event in Butha-Buthe on Monday. It was a festive occasion, marking a giant step in this small country's battle against AIDS.

The government of Lesotho has designated land for 10 satellite clinics, one in each district of the country, and will also help with operating costs. Baylor College of Medicine, Texas Children's Hospital and the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation will build the clinics and provide medical expertise to serve the young patients and their families.

The Baylor-Bristol-Myers Squibb Center of Excellence in Maseru opened in 2005. Two years ago, BIPAI assigned 10 members of its Pediatric AIDS Corps to Lesotho. There was one pediatrician in the entire country of Lesotho until BIPAI sent another physician in 2005. Through the Corps, a Baylor program funded by Bristol-Myers Squibb, fully trained pediatricians and family doctors were placed in the center.

These physicians, along with other trained medical workers in Lesotho, will staff the satellite clinics. The satellite clinics will offer counseling and testing services, as well as routine HIV care and treatment and laboratory services, said Kline, also professor of pediatrics at BCM and chief of retrovirology at Texas Children's. Complicated cases will be handled by the larger clinic in Maseru.

BIPAI's first center of excellence was opened in Romania in 2001. Since that time, the effort has expanded to programs in Mexico and the African countries of Botswana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania and Uganda.