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Work begins on children's AIDS center in Mbeya, Tanzania

HOUSTON – (April 17, 2009) – Groundbreaking ceremonies were held today in Mbeya, Tanzania, for a new center of excellence that will provide comprehensive pediatric HIV/AIDS care to children and their families through the Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative.

The center in Mbeya is a result of a public-private partnership that includes the Tanzanian government, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through USAID, BIPAI's sponsoring institutions (Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital), the Abbott Fund, Jan and Dan Duncan and the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word.

"The new BIPAI program in Tanzania is the result of a true public-private partnership that will benefit thousands of Tanzanian children and families," said Dr. Mark Kline, president of BIPAI, professor of pediatrics at BCM and chief of retrovirology at Texas Children's.

On hand for the groundbreaking ceremony were Guest of Honor and Regional Commissioner of Mbeya, Honorable John L. Mwakipesile; Honorable Atanasi Kapunga, Mayor of Mbeya, Dr. Eleuter Samky, Director of the Mbeya Referral Hospital; Christy Wistar, Vice President, Abbott Fund-Tanzania; and BIPAI Vice Presidents Michael Mizwa and Dr. Gordon Schutze, as well as a multitude of community partners.

Construction of the center is expected to be completed in mid 2010.

The Mbeya region has a population of over 2 million and an HIV prevalence rate of 13.5 percent. Currently, there are few resources in Tanzania for the care and treatment of HIV-infected children.

Groundbreaking for another center in Tanzania, in the region of Mwanza, is planned for next week. BIPAI has centers of excellence throughout Africa, but this is the first time two centers have been located in one country.

"I believe to become a center of excellence the center will have to have and to produce the best health workers in the field. As a center of excellence, it will work in collaboration with various stakeholders to find solutions to the problems of the poor infrastructure, shortage of drugs and consumables and failure of the referral systems for health that enable us to achieve our targets and goals in health," said Prof. David H. Mwakyusa, Minister of Health and Social Welfare.

The new center in Mbeya will be affiliated with and located on the campus of the Mbeya Referral Hospital.

The Abbott Fund, the philanthropic foundation of the global health care company Abbott, is supporting the center's construction. The Abbott Fund is a long-time supporter of BIPAI's efforts in Africa.

"We are excited that today's groundbreaking of the first pediatric HIV/AIDS center in Tanzania brings together two longstanding partners of the Abbott Fund in the fight against HIV/AIDS -- Baylor and the Government of Tanzania," said Christy Wistar, vice president, Abbott Fund, Tanzania. "We believe that this center will make an important and lasting difference in the lives and health of children affected by HIV/AIDS not only in the Mbeya region, but throughout the country."

Last August, PEPFAR announced a grant award of \$22.5 million over five years to support the operations of the two centers of excellence in Tanzania, along with the satellite facilities that will develop from the centers.

Through the two centers and the satellite clinics, 20,000 children will receive care. The centers will be staffed primarily by local health care workers, with assistance from physicians in BIPAI's Pediatric AIDS Corps program.

The two centers in Tanzania are the eighth and ninth established by BIPAI. The first center of excellence opened in Romania in 2001. Other centers are located in Botswana, Malawi, Uganda, Lesotho, Burkina Faso and Swaziland.

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