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Construction starts on children's AIDS center in Mwanza, Tanzania

HOUSTON – (April 24, 2009) – Construction of a new center of excellence to provide comprehensive pediatric HIV/AIDS care to children and their families officially began today in Mwanza, Tanzania. The center is part of a network directed by the Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative.

This is the second groundbreaking for a BIPAI clinic this month in Tanzania. The scaled up effort to provide care in the large country in East Africa is the 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 Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation and Jan and Dan Duncan.

"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 the Honorable Elinasi Palangyo, the guest of honor and District Commissioner of Sengerema; the Rt. Rev. Bishop Balina, Chairman of the Board of Governors of Bugando Medical Centre; the Honorable Leonard Bihonde, Mayor of Mwanza City; Dr. Meshale Mmasi, Regional Medical Officer; Dr. Patrick Swai, representing the U.S. Government; Gene Peuse, representing the U.S. Agency for International Development; Dr. Charles Majinge, director general of Bugando Medical Centre; Phangisile Mtshali, Director of Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation; Michael Mizwa, BIPAI Vice President of International Affairs; and Dr. Susan Gillespie and Susan Kelly, BIPAI-Tanzania medical and program directors. Construction of the center is expected to be completed by May 2010.

"Last year, over 1,400 infants aged between one to 18 months were tested at BMC and 18 percent of these infants were detected HIV-positive. Indeed it is estimated that up to 50 percent of HIV/AIDS infected babies in Tanzania are likely to die before the age of 24 months, if no intervention measures are taken to put things on the right course. We do hope that the BIPAI Initiative and the Children's Clinical Centre of Excellence will transform the child well-being in the Lake Zone and Tanzania in general," said Majinge, director general of the Bugando Medical Centre.

In his speech delivered by the District Commissioner, Prof. David H. Mwakyusa, the Minister of Health and Social Welfare, said, "The Centre of Excellence for pediatric care, the building and program of which we are marking its beginning today, will one way or another address these challenges. It is for this reason that the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania highly appreciate this project that has come timely and in the area where the demand is high"

The Mwanza region has a population of nearly 3 million and a 7.2 percent HIV prevalence rate. Earlier this month, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for a new center in Mbeya, Tanzania. Few resources have been available in Tanzania for the care and treatment of HIV-infected children.

"This public-private partnership exemplifies the good work being carried out by the American people toward strengthening the health of all Tanzanians. We look forward to continuing working together in partnership to ensure this country's children have healthier lives and a more prosperous future," said Larry André, acting U.S. ambassador to Tanzania.

The new center in Mwanza will be affiliated with and located on the campus of the Bugando Medical Centre.

The Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation is supporting the center's construction. The company also partners with BCM in sponsoring the Pediatric AIDS Corps, a program that supplements health care workers in Africa with American physicians. The Mwanza center will be staffed primarily by local health care workers, who will be assisted by PAC doctors.

"Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation is proud to support the development of this Center of Excellence and help enhance the lives of children in the Mwanza region. These children deserve the very best medical care available but have had limited access in the past," said John Damonti, president of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation. "We have already begun to help provide children in this community with quality care through the transitional facility, and this groundbreaking is an important step forward in improving health outcomes over the long term."

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 two centers in Tanzania are the eighth and ninth established by BIPAI. The first center of excellence opened in Romania in 2001. The Houston-based group has centers of excellence throughout Africa, but this is the first time two centers have been located in one country. Other centers of excellence are located in Botswana, Malawi, Uganda, Lesotho, Burkina Faso and Swaziland.

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