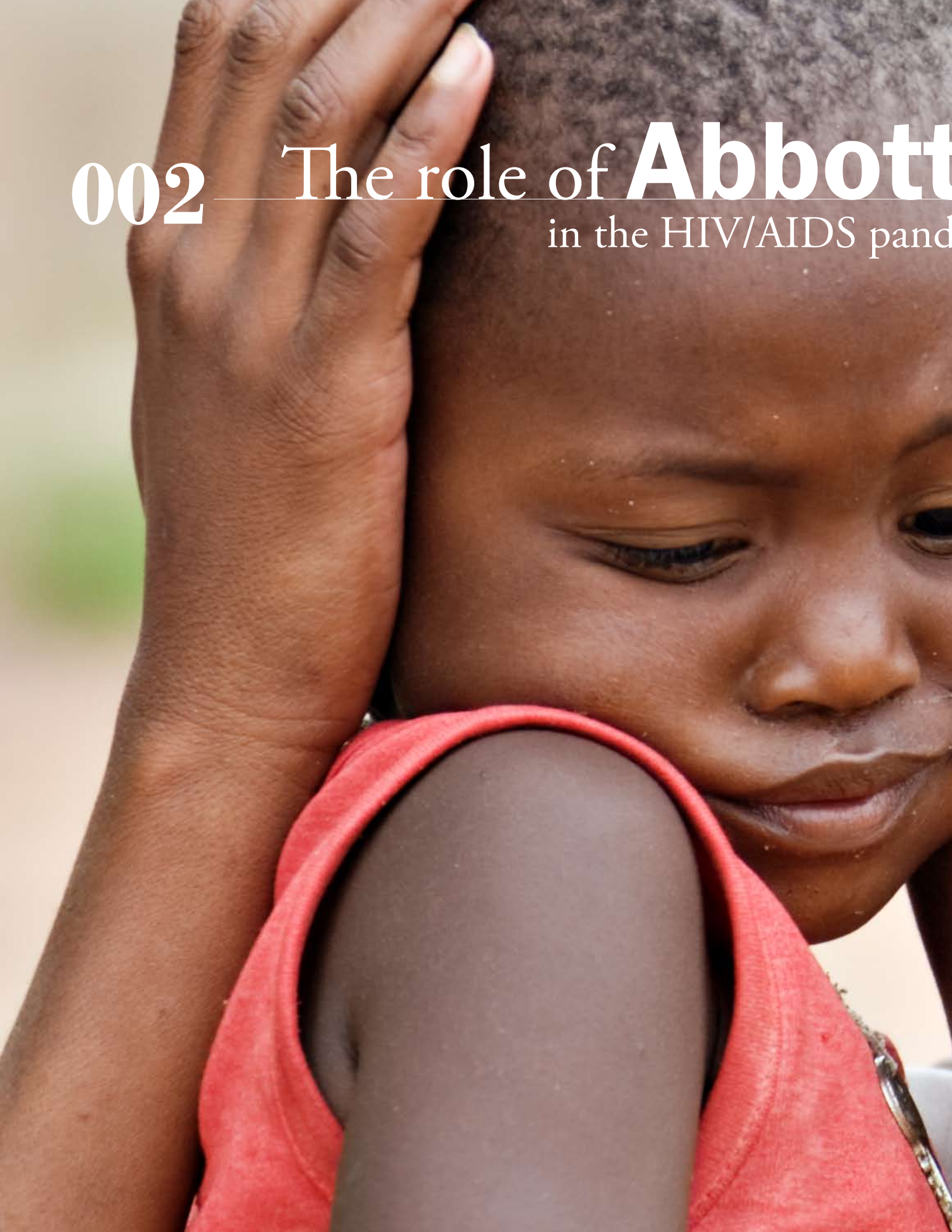




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The role of **Abbott**

in the HIV/AIDS pandemic

Labs

emic



The global fight against HIV/AIDS in developing countries, specifically sub-Saharan Africa, has a new battle. Drugs on which the hopes of prevention and treatment of the disease had been pinned are starting not to work. Abbott Labs, global leaders in pharmaceutical health care, is making important headway in the prevention and treatment of the virus.





ANTIRETROVIRAL DRUGS ARE medications for the treatment of infection by retroviruses, primarily HIV. When several of such drugs, typically three or four, are taken in combination, the approach is known as highly active antiretroviral therapy. Up to a point, they were the most effective treatment for HIV/AIDS. The problem with these drugs is they require an exact dosage schedule; if you miss a dose here or there, or take a pill late, the progress made in staying the disease is undone.

The drugs only have a chance of working if they are taken routinely, and are most effective only during the first trial. Because of lacking health education and inconsistent delivery of the medicines to the sub-Saharan, resistance to the drugs has risen to around five per cent in recent years. According to studies published in *AIDS*, the official journal of the International AIDS Society, resistance rates are as high as 80 per cent in some high-risk populations around the globe.

Abbott Labs and the SA government have taken action to reverse these trends and to harness the spread of the disease. Peter Lyons, Managing Director of Abbott Labs, South Africa division, describes the best strategy for meeting their goals is creating “accessibility and affordability.”

Affordability is indeed a problem. The UN estimated it will cost upwards of US\$25 billion to fight AIDS worldwide in 2010, money which does not account for drug-resistant strains, which would account for an additional US\$44 billion.

In 2002, South Africa began offering free HIV medication to the estimated 5.7 million people infected with HIV/AIDS with the help of Abbott. “We have been a major supplier of antiretroviral medication. Our products are at the forefront for treating second-line patients (those who develop a resistance to first-line drugs). A major focus for us is to make sure we can supply this at the best cost to the government,” says Lyons.

Abbott supplies the required medicines at cost, meaning, not-for-profit. Lyons says that Abbott’s philosophy is to supply their drugs for as little as possible so the government can purchase as much as possible, thus helping the greatest number of people. The company overhauled and streamlined their distribution centre (localising it), and passed on those savings to the government and, ultimately, patients.”

“We have invested in manufacturing capability,” says Lyons, “in Europe and in America to ensure that we can meet projected demands of SA and regional South Africa. That investment is based on the upscale of treatment in SA and supplying the highest-quality products

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Specpharm has in place several exclusive marketing and sales agreements with international pharmaceutical manufacturers to distribute their products in South Africa. In addition, the Company has a number of products, mostly generics, which are in the process of being registered at the Medicines Control Council.

The therapeutic categories of primary focus are:

- Antimicrobials - Includes ARV's (Antiretrovirals)*
- Cardiovascular System - Includes antihypertensives and cholesterol-lowering agents*
- Central Nervous System - Includes antipsychotics and antidepressants*



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to ensure no opportunity or possibility of resistance.”

Today, Abbott’s primary HIV medicine is approved for use in 154 countries worldwide, in every African country and, according to the World Health Organization, is the most widely registered HIV medication in the world.

Government support

Since 2002, the company is doing something new to offer HIV treatment to 2 million people. The Abbott Fund formed a unique public-private partnership with the Government of Tanzania, im-

plementing an initiative to strengthen the country’s health care system. The backbone of this program is the US\$50- million investment into the modernization of 80 hospitals and health-care centres places in rural areas. To date, this has had a far-reaching effect; more than 7,800 health care workers have been trained to provide HIV care and HIV tests have been provided to test over 180,000 people.

In terms of Africa, Abbott has faced a number of challenges in terms of distribution. Certain products require precise temperature control and need to be taken with meals. “We

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developed a process,” says Lyons, “and managed to form a tablet that does not require refrigeration and can be taken regardless of meal-times. It is a major relief in terms of distribution. All this is designed to help with accessibility and with compliance.”

Overall, Abbott’s philanthropic foundation, Abbott Fund, have invested more than US\$100 million in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa and the developing world.

Preventing mother-to-child HIV transmission

The transmission of HIV from a woman to her child during pregnancy or delivery causes the majority of childhood HIV cases in the developing world. An unfortunate truth is that babies are being born infected with HIV every day.

HIV drugs are the best defence for preventing the transmission of HIV to babies in utero. Over the past five years, Abbott has donated more than 8 million rapid HIV tests free of charge in 69 developing countries, including all of Africa.

These rapid tests produce results within minutes. And to women who test positive, Abbott Labs will provide free therapy. The Abbott Fund



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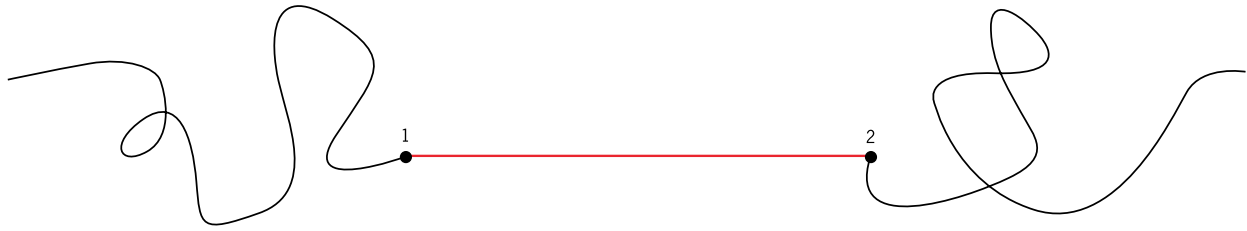
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is working with the Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB) to provide prevention of mother to child HIV transmission services in 70 faith-based health facilities in six provinces in Kenya. Through the partnership, care and treatment will be provided to pregnant women and exposed babies and infants.

Operation Smile

The Abbott Lab SA division is involved in an additional philanthropic endeavour that is bringing happiness into the lives of SA children. The division is involved with an organization called Operation Smile, which provides cleft lip and palate

surgery to children to whom it would otherwise not be available. "Operation Smile is a group who rely on physicians and companies to support them in doing palate-restoration type surgery," explains Lyons, "in areas where palate repairs, for example, may not be considered a priority. We supply our aesthetic agents and have been a major supporter for years."

How the world will continue to deal with the pandemics and disease in the future, and what form that battle will take is unknown. However it manifests, Abbott will be involved. **TABJ**



**AS SEEN IN THE MARCH 2010 ISSUE
OF THE AFRICAN BUSINESS JOURNAL**