

State to improve HIV data monitoring

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CAPE TOWN — The health department planned to implement a nationwide monitoring

system for HIV patients by the end of the year, the department's head of HIV/AIDS, Dr Nomonde Qundu, said yesterday.

Officials and activists have increasingly com-

plained that lack of data makes it difficult to assess SA's AIDS treatment programme, the largest in the world.

More than 110 000 patients were getting

AIDS drugs in government clinics and hospitals, and 90 000 in the private sector, but the absence of a national patient information system had made it difficult to build an accurate picture of how patients were faring, Qundu said in an interview after a meeting convened by the department in Johannesburg yesterday.

She said officials were therefore unable to say how many patients had dropped out of the programme, how many had died, nor how many had been forced to change drugs because of dangerous side-effects.

Lack of data also made it difficult for the health department to assess calls to alter its recommended cocktail of drugs, said Qundu.

The Treatment Action Campaign recently asked the Medicines Control Council to speed up registration of tenofovir,

and urged government to provide it instead of stavudine (d4t), saying it caused fewer side-effects.

Qundu said the department did not have the data it needed to determine whether a change to the recommended cocktail was warranted, partly because it had yet to receive information requested from researchers last November.

She said pilot patient monitoring systems were running in Free State, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Eastern Cape and Gauteng.

Staff were being trained to expand the programme, she said.

The meeting was to discuss SA's reporting methods to the United Nations on its HIV/AIDS programmes.

The gathering also discussed SA's contribution to an African Union health ministers meeting next week in Brazzaville, Congo.