

TREATMENT INFORMATION GROUP

thinking about AIDS drugs

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17 November 2005

Professor Pierre de Vos
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Dear Professor de Vos

Enjoying my daily shot of coffee at Anthony's Golden Cup on my walk to work down Long Street, I spotted a piece in the papers this morning announcing your intention to appeal against the Broadcasting Complaints Commission's dismissal of your charge concerning Tine van der Maas's claim on the radio to have restored the health of hundreds of AIDS sufferers, not with AIDS drugs, but with micronutrient-rich foods.

The **Treatment Information Group** is a public interest initiative to promote *research-based* debate of antiretroviral drug policy, alternative non-toxic treatment approaches to AIDS, and HIV testing issues in South Africa. The TIG has entered into a strategic alliance with the **Dr. Rath Health Foundation Africa** to achieve this.

The Terraces, 34 Bree Street, Cape Town
www.dr-rath-foundation.org.za

Propaganda is to democracies what violence is to dictatorships.
Noam Chomsky

It's outrageous that this woman should be allowed to broadcast what you rightly describe as her untrue and deadly claims. They were extremely misleading, confusing and damaging.

I don't know whether you ever saw her documentary movie about her work in the remote Ngcolosi region of rural KwaZulu-Natal last year, but all those dozens of 'before-and-after' cases that she had filmed must have been faked, and very cleverly too. One guy arrived in a wheelbarrow so skinny he couldn't walk and the next thing he left just about dancing. As you say, can't have people like her given air by irresponsible radio stations threatening the lives of thousands of people. Shouldn't we get the Law Commission to draw up a law to put a stop to this sort of thing? I'm sure Judge Cameron would be glad to pitch in. He's involved in all that AIDS law stuff.

As you correctly point out, and nobody knows this better than you, it's completely constitutionally untenable for the radio stations concerned to defend themselves by irrelevantly citing free speech principles. Obviously arguments about the importance of ventilating all views in our new constitutional democracy are just a total red herring. Because clearly, when people are dying, and the pharmaceutical industry has the life-saving medicine to save them, we can't allow quacks going around claiming on the radio that it's better to nourish impoverished sick Africans back to health as opposed to dosing them with AZT, 3TC, d4T and ddI – all in the same nucleoside analogue class as a whole bunch of cancer chemotherapy drugs used to poison off and kill cells on purpose. Next they'll be claiming that the broken health of these people is the consequence of their poverty, their chronic malnourishment

and so on, when everyone knows it's because of their uncontrollable promiscuity, especially when they're poor.

The very title of the Tim Modise show that caused the trouble, 'Effectiveness of diet to improve immune systems', was a travesty of the truth. You were absolutely spot-on to complain that this sort of talk threatens thousands of lives. Ask any AIDS expert and he'll tell you that it's only antiretroviral drugs that can boost the immune system of people living with the virus.

Anyway, to assist you in your appeal, I've enclosed a handy collection of statements about AZT made by our most respected medical authorities, public figures and treatment activists, most of whom have repeatedly won, and some themselves dished out, prestigious human rights awards for their tremendous contributions to the fight against AIDS in our country. (I've focused on AZT because, as I'm sure you know, it's the original, biggest selling and still the most widely used drug for saving the lives of people with AIDS. It's been such a success that GlaxoSmithKline sells more than a billion dollars worth annually.)

It would really give your argument before the appeal tribunal a bang were you to pepper it with quotations from these eminent personalities.

The helpful quotations I'm referring to are juxtaposed against some citations from the medical and scientific literature that I've collected (updated yesterday with the latest on ARV-induced wasting). My intention in preparing the document is to provide a brief introduction to the topic for noisy blokes with characteristic neurotic streaks on high moral horses given to hysterical popular

enthusiasms holding strong views shaped exclusively by what they've read in the newspapers and see on TV. And who never go anywhere near medical or scientific journals for their information.

To save you the trouble of wading through all those pointless and distracting research reports, however, I've highlighted the wisdom of the prominent experts and campaigners on whom you could rely to support your case on appeal. They include, you'll see, our adorable Nobel laureates Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, Dr Zackie Achmat LID (*honoris causa*), and undoubtedly the most scintillating legal intellect ever to have graced the South African judiciary, Edwin Cameron JA.

By the way, I think you're being way too soft in calling for R200,000 fines for each of the radio stations which broadcast the dangerous interview. I reckon you should go for at least a couple of million each. That might close them down, just like General Neethling fixed the *Vrye Weekblad*, and thereby make sure they never get up to the same mischief again. Since obviously what they're doing is nothing short of murder.

Good luck for your appeal and my special best wishes to your Constitutional Law students.

Cheers

ADV ANTHONY BRINK

Encl: *Introducing AZT: 'A World of Antiretroviral Experience'*

Cc: To various interested parties, and posted online at

www.tig.org.za