

This is a dossier of unanswered letters from the Treatment Information Group to the Medicines Control Council sent up between June 2004 and January 2005 concerning the serious permanent harm that the drugs AZT and nevirapine cause unborn and newly born children.

We're sure that after reading the shocking medical research findings canvassed in our letters, some very recent, you'll agree that the MCC's continued registration of nevirapine for administration to pregnant women and their newborn babies – crowned by its recommendation in July 2004 that the drug be taken in combination with AZT during pregnancy – evidences rank professional incompetence and grave institutional failure.

We suggest that the MCC's demonstrated inability to discharge its statutory mandate to protect South Africa's people, mostly black, mostly poor, from the marketing of these dangerous and ineffective drugs warrants urgent political intervention.

'... you are justified in sounding a warning against the long-term therapeutic use of AZT, or its use in pregnant women, because of its demonstrated toxicity and side effects. Unfortunately, the devastating effects of AZT emerged only after the final level of experiments were well underway, that is, the experiments which consisted of giving AZT to large numbers of human patients over a long period of time. Your effort is a worthy one ... I hope you succeed in convincing your government not to make AZT available.' **Professor Richard Beltz, inventor of AZT in 1961, to Advocate Anthony Brink, author of *Debating AZT: Mbeki and the AIDS drug controversy*, and convener and national chairperson of the Treatment Information Group**

The trouble with nevirapine by Adv Brink is 'an expertly written piece about this very dangerous drug.' **Jonathan Fishbein MD, former Director of the Office for Policy in Clinical Research Operations, Department of AIDS, US National Institutes of Health**

The front cover depicts a 25 mg phial of AZT (enlarged 3X) supplied by Sigma-Aldrich for use in research laboratories. The label bears a skull and crossbones icon set against an orange background to signify a potentially fatal toxic chemical hazard to the handler, spelt out in six languages, 'Toxic Giftig Toxique Toxico Tossico Vergiftig', and elaborated in the warning: 'TOXIC Toxic to inhalation, in contact with skin and if swallowed. Target organ(s): Blood Bone marrow. In case of accident or if you feel unwell, seek medical advice immediately (show the label where possible). Wear suitable protective clothing.'

A single capsule of AZT supplied by GlaxoSmithKline contains 100 mg – four times the amount in Sigma-Aldrich's 25 mg phial. GSK recommends that pregnant women be given a daily dose of between five and fifteen capsules of AZT a day – that is, between 500 and 1500 mg. This is 20 to 60 times the miniscule quantity of AZT in Sigma-Aldrich's 25 mg phial that the company warns is potentially lethal.

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.
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