

# FROM THE EDITOR



Clinicians working in the field of HIV medicine welcome the accelerated treatment access programmes that are providing standard of care to HIV-infected individuals. This has occurred as a result of the dramatic price reduction of antiretroviral therapies. A vast amount of education is required to bring health care professionals in our country up to speed regarding the toxicities, drug interactions and other complexities inherent in the wider use of antiretroviral drugs. One of the major issues related to the increasing use of these drugs is the question of viral

resistance. The virus has an enormous capacity to mutate and in the presence of sub-optimal drug concentrations resistance may manifest with surprising rapidity. In this issue the place of resistance testing is addressed by Dr Pierre Schoeman. In the management of patients, research has shown that patients who have had access to resistance testing have fared better than patients offered management based on clinical judgement alone. It is important to emphasise that the laboratory results should be interpreted in consultation with the clinician, where current clinical status, viral load, CD4 count and prior treatment history are important in formulating future treatment options.

The issue of drug resistance, however, goes beyond the individual case and has rapidly become a global public health issue. The incidence of transmission of drug-resistant isolates has risen alarmingly; between 1999 and 2000, 5.8% of patients infected with HIV acquired strains resistant to two classes of antiretroviral drugs, compared with just 0.4% 5 years previously. One in 7 newly infected persons in the USA now acquires a strain resistant to at least one class of antiretroviral. Clearly the situation in South Africa is not nearly as worrying. There is, however, an urgent need to track resistance patterns in South Africa and the establishment of a registry will facilitate this. This will require a collaboration between academia, the public sector and the private sector, where the most drug resistance is currently occurring.

## DES MARTIN

*Editor, Southern African Journal of HIV Medicine  
President, Southern African HIV Clinicians Society*

