

Lonmin puts AIDS in the firing line

Lonmin's South African platinum mining operations have embarked on a "Wellness" initiative to address the stigma associated with HIV infection and AIDS. The initiative is personally supported by both CEO Brad Mills and President of the Platinum operations, Alistair Ross and forms an integral part of the company's corporate HIV/AIDS program. Current estimates indicate that around one in every four Lonmin employees is HIV positive.

The Wellness initiative was the brainchild of Lonmin's medical services team and is designed to make people aware that HIV and AIDS are treatable but serious illnesses. It also aims to encourage people to know their health status, to engage employees and communities in their fight against Aids and to encourage acceptance of and support for work colleagues on Aids treatment.

The initiative takes the form of regular Wellness events where trained medical staff, together with trade union and management representatives, offer staff health information and counselling in a relaxed environment linked to sports and culture events. A recent Wellness day was attended by 7,000 people and featured a performance by South African gospel star Rebecca Malope.

Employees and community members who attend the Wellness events can test their HIV status and, if they wish, have blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes tests as well. Most of the tests on offer are rapid screen tests and the results are available within minutes. If abnormalities are detected then onsite counselling is offered and those tested are referred for further tests or treatment.

The program has been extremely successful in increasing the number of employees coming forward for testing. It includes free lifetime antiretroviral treatment for any employee who would benefit and currently over 500 people are being treated, with the majority leading healthy lives and continuing to work normally.