



SMS reminds TB patients to take their pills

By Robbie Brown

Medical experts have turned to hi-tech services to help control the tuberculosis epidemic surging in the Western Cape, which has the highest incidence of TB in the world.

One company now markets special pill bottles with built-in radio modules to remind patients to take their TB medication daily. If the patient fails to open the bottle, the company sends a reminder via SMS. If the message is ignored, a caregiver is notified.

The product called SIMpill reflects a major concern about the high number of TB sufferers who either refuse or forget to take their prescription drugs. About 2 000 people use the SIMpill bottle, usually financed by the provincial government.

'Tuberculosis is a national emergency in this country'

The SIMpill bottle increased proper use of TB medication from five percent to 75 percent according to one study.

"A lot of people who don't take their medication simply forget. If they have systems in place to remind them, they improve," Green said.

Irregular use of TB medication can have a costly toll, often resulting in the development of a more dangerous strain of the disease known as Multi-Drug Resistance TB (MDR-TB). Patients with MDR-TB have to pay R30 000 for medication compared to R300 for normal TB pills.

Given the expense of paying for MDR-TB medication, Green said it was worth spending R900 to be reminded by the SIMpill bottle technology.

Green said: "We have no doubt that it can at least halve the incidence of Multi-Drug Resistant TB."

Director of city health Ivan Toms said the government should balance the use of hi-tech services like SIMpill with personal care programmes like the Directly Observed Treatment Shortcourse (DOTS) to "win the TB battle".

The DOTS programme enlisted volunteers in the community to ensure patients take their daily prescribed medication. But lack of government funding has hampered the DOTS programme.

Tuberculosis is a surging health concern, particularly in the Western Cape where 24 000 new cases were reported last year.

In Cape Town 71 percent of TB cases are cured. But this rate should be boosted to the international average of 85 percent to effectively confront the problem, Toms said. "Tuberculosis is a national emergency in this country," he said.

- This article was originally published on page 4 of [The Cape Times](#) on May 31, 2005

CAPE TIMES

Published on the Web by IOL on 2005-05-31 07:32:00