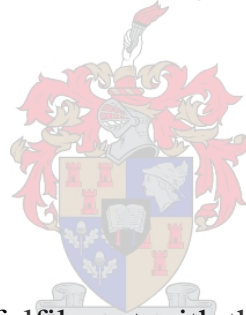


**THE MEDIA MANAGEMENT OF NEVIRAPINE: CONTENT,  
CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

By

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## Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my original work and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it at any university for a degree.

9 March, 2006



## ABSTRACT

This study presents an observation, analysis and effect indication of the media portrayal of the antiretroviral drug nevirapine in Western Cape daily newspapers. The research is aimed at ascertaining the quality and consequences of science reporting on an essential, yet too often politically controversial, AIDS treatment within the South African context. This work ultimately offers suggestions as to how the media could play a more beneficial role for the South African public when reporting on nevirapine and HIV/AIDS treatment in general.

A content analysis of news reports chosen over a recent time frame reveals a relatively high negative media portrayal of nevirapine. In-depth interviews with media practitioners demonstrate an apparent conflict of interest between journalistic good intentions to communicate useful and accurate treatment information on nevirapine to readers and a locally employed Western-style media policy which compromises the delivery of clear scientific fact on a life-saving drug. Interviews with AIDS specialists and patients confirm the dangerous consequences of a developed world reportage style ill-suited to a developing nation such as South Africa where media sensationalism is often read as fact by a large proportion of the educationally-challenged population.

The researcher suggests a shift in local media policy, with regard to health reporting in particular. The media could, without totally relinquishing its watchdog role, adopt a more socially responsible approach. This policy would ideally incorporate elements of development journalism promoting media guidelines which guarantee reliable channels of communication for the dissemination of correct scientific information on AIDS treatments.

South Africa is unique both within the context of its enormous AIDS epidemic and Government's use of nevirapine as a pawn for political agendas. It is the responsibility of a socially conscious media to understand and analyse this and present nevirapine as it should be within the context of a new and insecure democracy – a democracy which

faces a serious health challenge. Nevirapine, as a treatment for the prevention of perinatal mother to child transmission of the HIV virus, needs to be portrayed by the media as the second most effective way to curb the spread of a deadly disease, not as a tool for political manipulation.

## ABSTRAK

Hierdie studie toon waarnemings, ontledings en effekaanduidings van die mediavertolking van die antiretrovirale medikasie, Nevirapine, in die Wes-Kaapse dagblaaie. Die navorsing is daarop gemik om die gehalte en gevolge van wetenskaplike verslaggewing oor die noodsaaklike, maar dikwels polities omstrede, VIGS-behandeling binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te ontleed. Uiteindelik bied die werk voorstelle oor hoe die media oor die algemeen 'n voordeliger rol vir die Suid Afrikaanse publiek, wanneer oor Nevirapine en MIV/VIGS verslag gedoen word, kan lewer.

'n Inhoudsanalise van nuusverslae gekies oor 'n onlangse periode, vertoon 'n relatief negatiewe mediaweerspieëling van Nevirapine. In-diepte onderhoude met mediarolspelers toon enersyds 'n konflik van belange tussen joernalistieke goeie bedoelings om goeie en nuttige behandelingsinligting oor Nevirapine aan lesers te bied, en andersyds 'n plaaslike, Westerse styl mediabeleid wat die lewering van helder en wetenskaplike inligting oor 'n lewensreddende medikasie van die publiek weerhou. Onderhoude met VIGS spesialiste en pasiënte bevestig die gevaarlike gevolge van 'n ontwikkelde wêreld verslagstyl in 'n ontwikkelende land, soos Suid-Afrika, waar sensasionele verslaggewing dikwels as feit deur die minder opgevoede gedeeltes van die bevolking, aanvaar word.

Die navorser stel 'n verskuiwing van plaaslike mediabeleid, veral tenopsigte van gesondheidsverslaggewing, voor. Die media kan, sonder dat hulle hul "waghond"-rol verloor, 'n meer sosiaal-verantwoordelike benadering aanneem. Hierdie beleid sou ideaal elemente van ontwikkelingsjoernalistiek voorhou wat mediariglyne oor betroubare kanale van kommunikasie vir die verspreiding van wetenskaplik korrekte inligting oor VIGS behandeling, waarborg.

Suid Afrika is uniek, beide in die konteks van die enorme VIGS-epidemie en die Staat se gebruik van Nevirapine as pion vir politieke agendas. Dit is die verantwoordelikheid van 'n sosiaal bewuste media om dit te verstaan en analiseer en sodoende Nevirapine te vertoon soos dit behoort te wees binne die konteks van 'n nuwe en onsekere demokrasie - een wat 'n ernstige gesondheidskwessie in die gesig staar. Nevirapine, as behandeling vir die voorkoming van perinatale moeder-tot-kind oordrag van die MI virus, behoort deur die media weerspieël te word as die tweede mees effektiewe manier om die verspreiding van 'n dodelike siekte te stop en nie as 'n voertuig vir politieke manipulasie nie.



## Dedication

This research is dedicated to the courageous spirit of the disempowered women of South Africa and all those who strive to give new life a fair chance:

“Wherever there are HIV-positive children, we have failed”

*Dr Glenda Gray, Director of the Perinatal HIV Research at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital.*



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