

ETV must stop airing dangerous Christ Embassy commercials

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ETV is promoting quackery by airing Christ Embassy's weekly info commercial at 7:30 on Sunday mornings. During the commercial the pastor who runs the church claims to faith-heal a number of diseases including cancer, heart disease and arthritis. Christ Embassy's website claims that Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the proprietor of this church, can faith-heal HIV.

ETV's 3rd Degree has been outspoken against AIDS quackery and denialism and so it is disappointing that the station runs Christ Embassy adverts, which are quackery and a threat to public health, says Nathan Geffen, TAC Treasurer.

Many religious organisations are playing a critical role in the fight against HIV and TB in South Africa, raising awareness, providing spiritual and emotional support to people with these conditions and thereby helping them to adhere to the medications which cure TB and suppress HIV in the blood to restore people's health.

This is not the case with Christ Embassy. By claiming to heal life-threatening conditions, Christ Embassy is leading people to believe that they no longer have to adhere to treatment or seek appropriate medical care.

Dr Graeme Meintjes of the University of Cape Town says that "Without treatment HIV and drug-resistant TB are fatal. I have direct experience of this happening: a patient with HIV and drug-resistant TB infection died after stopping medication for both these conditions. She had been doing well on treatment prior to joining Christ Embassy. The drug-resistant TB was transmitted to family members before her death, illustrating that there are also public health consequences."

Andile Madondile, a TAC treatment literacy trainer in Khayelitsha, warns that: "If a person is told they have been cured from HIV they can stop taking their ARVs, develop resistance and get sick. They can also stop protecting their partners by stopping using condoms."

In light of these urgent public health concerns, TAC lodged a complaint with the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa (ASASA) on 22 November 2009. ETV was copied on the advert. Under the advertising code, advertisements cannot make unfounded claims about treating or curing a disease listed in appendix F.

ASASA ruled on 1 June 2010 that the content was, according to ETV, sponsored programming and not an advertisement, and, therefore ASASA does not hold jurisdiction over its content. TAC is appealing the ruling.

On 29 March 2010 TAC sent a request directly to ETV raising our concerns and requesting that ETV cease running the commercial. We have followed up on this request, but ETV has consistently ignored it and is still running the commercial weekly. The first time ETV showed any interest in responding to our request was when an ETV representative contacted us immediately after our press alert last week. He promised to send an official response within 24 hours. Several days later we are still waiting.

South Africa is facing dual HIV/TB epidemics and therefore South African media outlets have a responsibility to

promote correct information about prevention, treatment and care. The promotion of quackery by ETV is undermining these efforts. We call on ETV to cease airing the commercials.

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