

[HEALTH - HIV/AIDS]

Ignore HIV at your own risk

Call for IT industry to take action

BY KIMBERLY GUEST

A NEW STUDY carried out by Markinor and the Bureau of Market Research (BMR) at the University of South Africa has noted that highly skilled people and those in higher socio-economic groups have growing rates of HIV infection. Nevertheless, The People Business Group's (TPB) Recruitment Manager Louise Huyser says management continues to see the HIV risk as one which impacts at blue collar level.

For IT companies that have neglected or half-heartedly implemented HIV/Aids programmes, the research provides a reality check. While wealthy people are still less likely to become HIV-infected than poor people, the increase in HIV infection in this group is noteworthy, according to the survey.

“The estimated percentage of high income individuals who were HIV positive was 8.5% in 2005, compared to 6.1% in 2002. In the middle income group the corresponding figures were 18% and 15.6%, while in the low income group they were 23.4% and 20.6%,” says the team.

Accordingly, Huyser says the IT industry needs to sensitise itself to the issues and take appropriate action.

“We are beginning to see the impact of Aids on our young skilled workforce and companies need to take cognisance of this in order to manage the risk of a long-term skills loss. In the IT industry especially, where individuals are typically more technically minded than people focused, it is vital that management seek the development of appropriate skills that will



Louise Huyser

equip them to sensitively communicate about and deal with Aids-related issues in the workplace,” she explains.

Another concern for Huyser is the general lack of conversation within the industry on the HIV issue.

“Should such companies not seek skills development and implement relevant awareness and support programmes, they run the risk that their top talent might fall silent about their status in order to avoid discomfort. Having a workforce that takes a vow of silence on their status could be incredibly damaging as succession planning and unexpected skills loss can cripple a company financially,” she warned.

For an industry that is already struggling under the impact of skill shortages, the threat of unaddressed HIV related issues - combined with the widespread “it won't happen to me” belief system - could be crippling in years to come.