

Prisons benefit from mobile TB testing

South Africa has the third highest TB rate in the world, and the prevalence of TB and MDR-TB (multidrug-resistant TB) in the country's prisons has been estimated by the departments of justice and correctional services as three to seven times more than that of the general population.

This has led to calls being made for the routine TB screening of offenders and awaiting-trial prisoners. However, few prisons have the facilities to conduct routine screening. "The solution, therefore, is to take the screening process to the prisons," says Precious Mdlankomo of Mmidi Occupational Health Services, which received a contract to conduct routine screening at prisons around the country.



Fully-fledged X-ray system

"We knew that the type of equipment used for prison screenings in the past had been hopelessly inadequate. What we needed was a fully-fledged X-ray room that could be transported safely over all types of terrain and set up inside the prison grounds; and be able to cope with hundreds of patients every day."

Mdlankomo approached Bidvest Medical, with her requirements and the company developed a customised solution: a 5m (l) x 2,2m (w) x 2,2m (h) truck equipped with a special battery pack enabling it to be used in the most remote locations provided a single-phase power supply is available.

The truck is equipped with the Konica Minolta Aero-RAD digital x-ray system; as well as the lightweight AeroDR digital panel, a durable wireless/tethered digital radiography system - a solution that offers high-image resolution at low doses as well as easy workflow and reliability.

Within six months of being commissioned, the truck travelled to prisons across the Northern Cape, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal to screen thousands of individuals including offenders, awaiting trial prisoners and Correctional Services personnel.

“The truck totally exceeded our expectations. It drove like a dream, even when having to navigate roads which were in very poor condition; and setting up inside the prisons was quick and easy. We were also extremely grateful for our own power supply because there were times when we were unable to use the prison’s power supply,” Mdlankomo says.

Branched out to forestry services

The truck has not only been used in prisons. It has branched out into conducting pre-employment screening of candidates applying for jobs in the forestry sector – which has demanded that the truck be taken to some extremely remote locations.

“We are delighted with the result of our endeavours to produce a mobile occupational health facility that will serve a very real need in South Africa,” says Juneid Docrat, Bidvest Medical general manager.

“We are now gearing up to build more customised trucks for virtually any mobile medical application, from mobile clinics to sophisticated mobile mammography centres. We believe the production of more such mobile health facilities will play an increasingly important role in healthcare for Africa,” he concludes.

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