

Lunch break circumcision is a snip for only R400

What was once dubbed 'the unkindest cut' is now a lifesaver

KANINA FOSS

JOBURG men can now get circumcised during their lunch breaks. The snip that saves lives is done at the ZuziMpilo Medical Centre in the CBD. It takes just one hour and costs R400.

Clinical trials in African countries including South Africa have proved that surgically circumcised men have a 50 to 60 percent less chance of being infected with HIV.

This is because the inside of the foreskin is more easily permeated by HIV-infected bodily fluids than the rest of the penis.

Circumcision is also more hygienic, and according to the founder of ZuziMpilo, Dr Neil Martinson, women prefer men who are circumcised.

"We're saying abstain, be faithful, use condoms, and yet in South Africa, HIV prevalence remains about 30 percent in pregnant women.

"The concern is that after all these measures, we still have these incredibly high rates of HIV. Clearly we need more," said Martinson.

The clinic started offering circumcision in mid-February. It has received calls from all over the country, but it has circumcised only about 12 men.

Martinson hopes that

numbers will increase in winter when traditional initiations take place and demand for circumcisions increases.

Many urban dwellers go to clinics or hospitals to be circumcised because they prefer a safe environment that offers pain medication.

Patients are given counselling, which takes about half an hour. They are reminded that circumcision does not offer full protection against HIV infection and that they should continue using condoms. They are also tested for HIV. If a patient is HIV-positive and his CD4 count is lower than 200, the circumcision will not be done.

The procedure itself takes about 20 minutes, and is performed by a doctor and a nurse. Local anaesthetic is administered and a clamp is used to pull the foreskin free of the

penis before the incision is made.

According to Martinson, it's possible for "Chuck Norris types" to go straight back to work, but it's advisable to take the day off.

Patients are told not to have sex for six weeks after being circumcised, and to avoid erections in the first few days. They are given a strong oral anaesthetic for the first two days, and told to take Panado thereafter.

Complications like infection are extremely rare, but a follow-up visit takes place a week after the procedure.

The R400 fee barely covers basic costs, and is subsidised by the US government, which funds the centre. Martinson said GPs charged about R700 and urologists at private hospitals about R2 000.

One of the reasons the centre's services may be slow to

take off is that the government hasn't issued any major call for circumcision.

According to Martinson, this is because public hospitals don't have the capacity to deal with large numbers of people requesting circumcisions.

Last year, King Goodwill Zwelithini dispelled beliefs that Zulu men shouldn't be circumcised, saying that in the past men were needed on the battlefield and couldn't afford to take time out to heal, but that it was now time to embrace circumcision.

The centre is targeting younger men.

"We want to get people close to the onset of their sexual debut to try to prevent new infections," Martinson said.

To make an appointment visit the centre on the corner of Jeppe and Joubert streets, or call 0860 467 456.

CUT PRICE:
ZuziMpilo Medical Centre offers circumcisions at a discount as part of an Aids prevention drive. The clinic in the Joburg CBD also offers other Aids-related treatments.

PICTURE:
ANTOINE DE RAS