Former US president to visit Botswana

GABORONE - Former United States President George W. Bush will pay a one-day official visit to Botswana on July 5.

President Bush is expected to launch the Expanded Cancer Treatment Programme, which is a P21 million initiative related to women’s health.

A press statement from the U.S. embassy says the innovative programme will dramatically decrease the time needed for examination, diagnosis, and treatment of cervical cancer.

It is funded by the American public through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and supported by the Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon partnership, which includes many public and private sector organisations.

The effort will expand and maximise the impact of the “See and Treat” programme for cervical cancer, which has already served hundreds of women in Botswana, the statement says.

Led by PEPFAR, the George W. Bush Institute, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon will expand the availability of vital cervical cancer screening and treatment, especially for high-risk HIV-positive women.

Botswana is the second African nation to participate in the Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon programme.

The statement says the “See and Treat” programme includes visual examination and, if necessary, immediate treatment.

The programme was initiated by the Ministry of Health with US government support in 2009.

This innovative programme, according to the US embassy, is distinct from the more common cervical cytology procedure, otherwise known as a Pap smear, which involves more extensive laboratory work that frequently results in delays in diagnosis and difficulty in follow-up with patients who require treatment.

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in Botswana and it is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths for women in the country and more aggressive in women who are HIV positive.

The scale up of the “See and Treat” programme will include the establishment of five new sites where women will have access to same day examinations, diagnosis, and treatment.

In serious cases, the patients may be referred for additional diagnostics and treatment at other facilities.

The statement says the Ministry of Health, with support from implementing partners such as the University of Pennsylvania and CDC Botswana, will coordinate the implementation of the expanded “See and Treat” programme.