

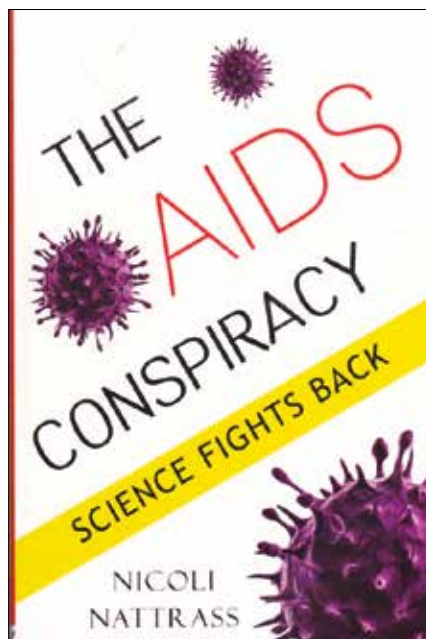
## BOOK REVIEWS

## The AIDS Conspiracy: Science Fights Back

By Nicoli Natrass. Johannesburg:  
Wits University Press, 2012.  
ISBN 9781868145621

Prof. Nicoli Natrass is an economist who has contributed substantially to the understanding of health issues in South Africa (SA). In this important book she addresses the background factors that contributed to the dark AIDS denialism period in SA's healthcare history. Although the book deals primarily with the AIDS pandemic, many of the insights contribute to a better understanding of the way in which all conspiracy beliefs function.

Conspiracy beliefs included that the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) may have been created in a laboratory, and that the pharmaceutical industry invented AIDS to sell more toxic drugs. Swallowing this belief from the denialists, President Mbeki



and the then Minister of Health delayed the provision of treatment, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths, increasing the spread of the virus, and marginalising our medical professionals and scientists.

Natrass identifies players who contribute to the development and maintenance of conspiracies: the hero scientists, dissidents who lend credibility to the movement; the cultpreneurs, alternative therapists who exploit this for their own benefit; the living icons, who claim to be living proof of the legitimacy of the denialism; and the praise singers, media people who broadcast the false messages to the public.

Science and evidence-based medicine have fought back by their evidence and political credibility. However, this is not a single battle. It requires ongoing vigilance.

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