Best practice and research in microbicides

A series of contributions by leading microbicides scientists in the August edition of Best Practice and Research in Clinical Obstetrics & Gynaecology discusses the viability of microbicides as a preventative HIV strategy in an increasingly feminised pandemic.

Coverage of the event marking 10 years of partnership between CAPRISA and the community appears on page 2.

On page 3 is an update on new HIV/TB drug resistance testing technologies.

CONTACT DETAILS
CAPRISA
Doris Duke Medical Research Institute (DDMRI) (2nd Floor), University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X7, Congella 4013 South Africa
T: +27-31-260 4555
F: +27-31-260 4566
E-mail: caprisa@ukzn.ac.za
www.caprisa.org.za
A celebration marking a decade of partnership with community leadership was held at the Vulindlela Clinic on Sunday 26 August 2012. Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim recounted the invitation in 2001 by the traditional leader, Nkosi Zondi, for CAPRISA to partner with the community in finding solutions to the devastating impact of HIV.

The subsequent work in the district yielded valuable knowledge about infection rates, particularly amongst adolescent pregnant girls, as well as behavioural factors that contributed to the spread of HIV. Over time, the antiretroviral treatment programmes provided evidence that people with HIV would live a normal and healthy life.

In more recent years, attention has also been given to HIV prevention work. The CAPRISA 004 tenofovir gel study has great significance in women’s empowerment and ability to control their HIV risk.

Prof Abdool Karim also stressed the importance of eradicating discrimination about HIV by encouraging everyone to be tested and to know their HIV status. She said: “Whether you are HIV positive, or HIV negative, options for treatment and prevention are available to everyone in the form of abstinence, behaviour change, condoms, knowing your status, counselling, circumcision, treatment as prevention, oral or gel ARVs.”

In conclusion, she acknowledged the community for being an inspiration of strength, courage and resilience.

In response, guest of honour, Inkosi Zondi Senior—Chairperson of the House of Traditional leaders—recognised the importance of the community gathering during Women’s Month.

He stated that thanks to the tenofovir gel study there was a light at the end of the tunnel and he hoped that a cure for AIDS would soon be available. He thanked CAPRISA for all the good work done in the district.

The proceedings concluded with the handing over of certificates of appreciation to the traditional councils in the area as well as a gesture of gifts to local councillors and the community and schools research support group members (CRSG and SRSG).

Lastly, a paper on scaling up HIV programmes explores opportunities to translate small-scale trials into effective roll-out strategies in constrained healthcare systems. In providing a framework to evaluate the use of microbicides as a public health tool, the paper proposes the introduction of the quality-improvement approach to strengthen health systems using existing points of care, such as family planning clinics.

For further reading:
Creating access to HIV/TB drug resistance testing

During July, the acclaimed researcher, Dr Tulio de Oliveira from the Southern African Treatment Research Network (SATuRN), was invited to CAPRISA to visit CAPRISA’s eThekwini Clinical Research Site. He also presented latest developments on affordable HIV and TB drug resistance testing and open access, public, drug resistance databases to CAPRISA’s management team, followed by discussions on possible opportunities for collaboration.

Together with its 24 research partners, SATuRN has collated over 7000 resistance genotypes linked to treatment and clinical information in Southern Africa. Its research and development strategy has drastically reduced the cost of drug resistance genotyping and, as part of its capacity building efforts, the network has delivered training in drug resistance testing and management to 1346 physicians and nurses in southern Africa. Later this year it will hold its 7th annual workshop at the Cape Town International Convention Centre.

Dr de Oliveira is a senior researcher at the Wellcome Trust-Africa Centre for Health and Population Studies in Mtubatuba, KwaZulu Natal. He is also a director of the (SATuRN) in KwaZulu Natal, which has developed the advanced diagnostic technologies. Using genotyping analysis, SATuRN aims to create cost effective HIV and TB resistance testing, which Dr Oliveira would like to see being widely implemented to patients and providers.

For more information, visit: www.bioafrica.net/saturn

NIH funding workshop

Ms Marian Swart, Chief Operations Officer for CAPRISA, was recently invited to co-facilitate a University of KwaZulu Natal sponsored workshop on National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant applications processes.

The two-day workshop, which was attended by 20 researchers, PhD candidates and research administrative staff from the university, allowed participants to gain in-depth understanding of NIH policies, funding opportunities, application processes, budgeting, management of awards and reporting.

For more information, contact:

Dr Lenine Liebenberg, CAPRISA - Liebenberg@ukzn.ac.za, or
Dr Christina Thobakgale, HPP - Thobakgalec@ukzn.ac.za

Women in Science Awards

Dr Senge Sibeko was named as the first runner-up in the South African Department of Science and Technology’s Women in Science Award 2012 in the category of Development of Rural Women: Emerging Researchers. Dr Sibeko was until earlier this year a study gynaecologist with CAPRISA. She is currently an Oxford University Fellow.

For more information, contact:

Dr Senge Sibeko

Post-Doc Forum takes off

Since its inception in March 2012, the monthly Post-Doctoral Forum — an initiative of CAPRISA, HPP and K-RITH — has hosted respected guest scientists from the University of KwaZulu Natal, John Hopkins University, University of the Witwatersrand, University of Cape Town and New York University.

The Forum was established to promote communication, interaction and collaboration between post-doctoral fellows within the three institutes. Participants are encouraged to use the forum to share relevant novel technologies, complementary research interests, noteworthy journal articles and funding opportunities.

More recently, the Forum has identified an opportunity for its post-doctoral members from CAPRISA, HPP and K-RITH to host basic science lecture series outside their research project scopes to discuss virology, immunology and genetics. It is envisaged that postgraduate students at the DDMRI will be invited to attend these sessions.

The meetings are being sponsored in rotation by Professor Salim Abdool Karim from CAPRISA, Professor Thumbi Ndung’u of HPP and Prof William Bishai of K-RITH.

For more information, contact:

Dr Lenine Liebenberg, CAPRISA - Liebenberg@ukzn.ac.za, or
Dr Christina Thobakgale, HPP - Thobakgalec@ukzn.ac.za

Photograph taken at the inaugural Post-Doctoral Forum held in March 2012. Left to right: Dr Muki Shey (CAPRISA), Dr Lilian Sacks (K-RITH), Dr Raveesh Singh (HPP), Dr Richard Kangethe (HPP), Dr Bridgette Cumming (K-RITH), Dr Kamini Gounder (HPP), Dr Derseree Archary (CAPRISA), Dr Jacklyn Wright (HPP), Dr Paradise Madlala (HPP). Front row: Co-ordinators Dr Lenine Liebenberg (CAPRISA), Dr Christina Thobakgale (HPP)
Research papers published in 2012


Naranbhai V, Alfled M, Abdool Karim Q, Nduvu T, Abdool Karim SS, Carr WH; on behalf of the CAPRISA 004 TRAPS Team. Natural Killer cell function in women at high risk for HIV acquisition: Insights from the CAPRISA 004 microbicide trial. *AIDS* 2012; Jul 7. [Epub ahead of print]


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Scientific Reviews

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Conference & Workshop Reminders

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