Building Capacity for Science & Technology in Africa

During his recent visit to CAPRISA, Professor Berhanu Abegaz, Executive Director of the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) met with senior CAPRISA staff to gain insights into how to establish a world class research institute in Africa.

During meetings with CAPRISA’s senior leadership he explored the organisation’s vision and goals and met with administrative and science support staff to appreciate the synergy between components of the Centre. Systems to manage multiple grants, research support cores, research infrastructure were of particular interest to him.

The AAS, which was established in 1985, aims to be a major player in ‘driving sustainable development in Africa through science, technology and innovation’. Professor Abegaz said an academy needed to work closely with the government it was associated with as well as with the ‘political echelons’ but it also had to maintain its distance to ensure independence.

Professor Abegaz delivered a public lecture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) titled: Capacity Building for Science and Technology in Africa – an African Academy of Sciences Perspective hosted by UKZN Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Deresh Ramjugernath. In his lecture Professor Abegaz highlighted the challenges and opportunities facing Africa and said that the future of the continent depended on the youth, its greatest asset. He outlined the AAS Young Affiliates’ Programme which is aimed at early to mid-career professionals and emphasised the value of inspiring young people and providing good mentors to nurture the next generation of research leadership. He said a total of 25 affiliates will be selected every year and provided with ‘inspirational, tangible support’ for five years.

The AAS has a strategic partnership with the African Union and NEPAD and has honoured over 300 fellows, three of whom are Nobel Prize winners. It is open to all sciences - life and physical sciences, applied and social sciences and the humanities, including indigenous knowledge. “Our academy is an academy of all knowledge and is not discipline specific or restricted to any discipline,” said Abegaz.
CAPRISA hosted an Implementation Science (IS) workshop on 23 March to showcase the projects undertaken by the trainees of a PEPFAR funded supplemental grant to the CU-SA Fogarty AIDS Training Programme (CU-SA AITRP) through the Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health.

Delegates were welcomed by Ms Frances Chisholm, US Consul-General and Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim Director of the CU-SA Fogarty AIDS Training Program.

In her presentation entitled: Building implementation science research capacity in KwaZulu-Natal South Africa, Professor Abdool Karim said that the purpose of the IS programme was to build a critical mass of well trained public health implementation scientists in KwaZulu-Natal “to enhance our response to the HIV and AIDS and TB epidemics through, among others, bridging the gap between proof of concept studies and programmatic scale-up of interventions.” She cautioned that “now is not the time to slow down our HIV and AIDS efforts”.

The workshop was divided into three sessions. The first session focused on “Enhancing TB Management”, the second on “Surveillance, HIV Testing and Linkage to Care” and the third on “Introducing New Interventions in Communities and Reaching Key Populations”. Mentors and members of the evaluation panel provided valuable feedback.

The winners of the three best presentations were Dr Marian Loveday (1st prize) from the Medical Research Council for her project on “Decentralised management of MDR-TB patients in KZN – final outcomes”, Roger Phili (2nd prize) from the National Health Laboratory Service for his project on “Feasibility of implementation of MMC in public sector health facilities in KwaZulu-Natal” and Nelisile Ngcobo (3rd prize) from CA-PRISA for her project on “Implementation of voluntary medical male circumcision using a school-based recruitment programme in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa”.

Successful Implementation Science Training Workshop held at CAPRISA
**MRC and NIH fund studies to improve STI care and reduce HIV risk**

The Medical Research Council of South Africa and the National Institute of Health in the United States have awarded a $297 000 grant that will enable scientists to study the effects of reducing genital inflammation and HIV risk through improved STI care. This proof-of-concept study aims to establish if a new model of diagnosing and treating STIs can reduce genital inflammation in women, thereby reducing the risk of HIV acquisition.

Principal investigators of the study Dr Nigel Garrett, Head of Vaccine and Pathogenesis at CAPRISA, and Professor Anne Rompalo at Johns Hopkins University will lead the studies over a two year period. “STIs are extremely common in South African women and treatment is currently based on symptoms alone, for example, vaginal discharge, rather than detecting and diagnosing specific organisms. Up to 80% of these STIs present with no symptoms, and therefore remain undiagnosed.” explained Dr Garrett.

The proposed work will include the evaluation of the GeneXpert (Cepheid) point-of-care technology to diagnose and treat STIs immediately on the same visit. This technology is currently used in South Africa to diagnose tuberculosis. In addition, “the study will explore better ways of partner notification and expedited partner therapy interventions to prevent re-infection,” said Dr Garrett.

The co-investigators are Professor Jo-Ann Passmore (UCT), Dr Lenine Liebenberg (CAPRISA), Professor Adrian Mindel from Australia, Professor Koleka Mlisana (UKZN) and Dr Kerry Leask (CAPRISA).

**ICAP Swaziland HRTP delegation**

Over the last 2 years CAPRISA facilitators Tanuja Gengiah and Charlene Harichund have provided an ‘Introduction to regulatory considerations, GCP and human subject protections in clinical trials’ training to fellows and mentors affiliated to the Swaziland Health Research Training Program (HRTP).

This initiative is spearheaded by ICAP and Swaziland Ministry of Health. From 4-6 February 2015 a delegation of 12, including 6 fellows, 4 mentors and 2 facilitators spent time at the CAPRISA eThekwini research site and CAPRISA DDMRI where they received practical exposure to enhance their understanding of clinical trial conduct and the associated regulatory and GCP considerations.
Scientific papers published in 2015

16 van Logterenbergh F, Gray D, Gengiah S, Kunene P, Gengiah TN, Naidoo K, Grant AD. A Qualitative Study of Patient Motivation to Adhere to Combination Antiretroviral Therapy in South Africa. AIDS patient care and STDs 02/2015; DOI: 10.1089/apc.2014.0293


*continuation from previous newsletter

Scientific Reviews

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# for month, * since committee initiation

Conference & Workshop Reminders

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