Our feature story this month focuses on the results of a cross sectional household survey published in Lancet HIV in July 2018.

On page 2 we pay tribute to Bongani Mayosi, a leading cardiology professor who passed away on 27 July 2018 and highlight the visit of senior BRICS health officials to CAPRISA on 18 & 19 July.

The CAPRISA Young Adults Workplace experience programme is provided on page 3. We also congratulate two students from the NICD who were awarded their Masters degrees with distinction.

On page 4 we congratulate two CAPRISA staff members on their iSpotU awards for innovation.

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36.3% HIV prevalence in KwaZulu-Natal community: Findings of a PEPFAR survey

A survey in rural KwaZulu-Natal found that more than a third (36.3%) of the adults in this community were HIV positive. HIV prevalence was significantly higher at 44.1% in women compared to 28.0% in men (p<0.001).

A community wide survey undertaken from June 2014 to June 2015, published recently in The Lancet HIV, enrolled 9,812 randomly selected men and women 15-49 years in the Greater Edendale and Vulindlela areas in the uMgungundlovu district, KwaZulu-Natal.

Stratified by age, HIV prevalence across each 2 year age band was higher in women compared to men and by age 25, almost 50% of women were already HIV positive (Figure). HIV prevalence peaked at 66.4% in women 35-39 years and 59.6% in men 40-44 years. Consistent condom use in the last 12 months was 26.5% in men and 22.7% in women, (p=0.0033); 35.7% of women’s male partner and 31.9% of men were medically circumcised, (p<0.001), whilst 45.6% of women and 36.7% of men reported being on antiretroviral therapy (p=0.0003).

HIV viral suppression was achieved in 54.8% of women and 41.9% of men (p<0.001) and 87.2% of women and 83.8% (p=0.3670) men on ART. Age, incomplete secondary schooling, being single, having more than one lifetime sex partners (women), sexually transmitted infections and not being medically circumcised were associated with HIV positive status.

- Ayesha Kharsany: Senior Scientist

For further reading see:


Figure: HIV prevalence in 2 year age bands in 2014/5 in rural KwaZulu-Natal

- Ayesha Kharsany: Senior Scientist

For further reading see:

A tribute to Professor Bongani Mayosi

In November, we learnt of the passing of our colleague Professor Bongani Mayosi, Dean of the University of Cape Town’s Faculty of Health Sciences, who was a graduate of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Professor Mayosi passed away on 27 July 2018 at the age of 51.

Professor Mayosi was a world-class South African cardiologist. He was a leading scholar globally on TB pericarditis and rheumatic heart disease including being the co-author of the updated Jones Criteria for the diagnosis of rheumatic fever. He established the African CardioMyopathy and MyocardiTis REsearch Programme (IMHOTEP), which contributed important studies of (1) prevalence of myocarditis, (2) pathogenesis of HIV-associated cardiomyopathy, and (3) familial aggregation of cardiomyopathy.

He received numerous accolades and awards during his research career. He was elected to the US National Academy of Medicine last year, one of the highest honours in the fields of health and medicine. He was also the recipient of South Africa’s highest honour, the Order of Mapungubwe in Silver, for excellent achievements in medical science.

His numerous honours included the South African Medical Research Council’s Platinum Award; South African Medical Association Merit Award; National Science and Technology Foundation – BHP Billiton Award; Fellowship of the University of Cape Town and the National Research Foundation Award for Transforming the Science Cohort in South Africa to name just a few.

He also played an active role in identifying and mentoring a number of talented South African clinician and medical scientists.

He will be remembered for his scientific rigour, his contributions to capacity development in the country and his dedication to improving public health. With regard to the latter, he was a key contributor to the Lancet series on “Health in South Africa”. Our thoughts are with his family.

Senior BRICS and Department of Health officials visit CAPRISA

CAPRISA hosted two delegations of senior BRICS health officials on 18 and 19 July. The BRICS Ministers of Health and senior health department officials were in Durban for BRICS health sector meetings ahead of the 10th BRICS Summit.

Ms Precious Matsotso, Director General in the Department of Health in South Africa, led a delegation of deputy health ministers and deputy director generals on their visit to CAPRISA’s headquarters on 18 July. On 19 July Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, MEC for Health in KwaZulu-Natal accompanied a delegation of BRICS ministers and deputy ministers of health to CAPRISA. The BRICS officials toured the CAPRISA facilities and engaged with CAPRISA’s Directors.

Following their tour of CAPRISA’s laboratories the BRICS officials gained insight into CAPRISA’s key HIV prevention and TB-HIV co-infection research. Professor’s Salim Abdool Karim’s presentation titled: HIV and TB: A focus on BRICS health priorities, elicited much interest and discussions.
CAPRISA hosts high school students for work experience and career guidance

Twenty-six enthusiastic learners participated in the CAPRISA Young Adults Work Experience programme from 10 – 13 July, which was facilitated by CAPRISA’s Human Resources department.

The initiative aims to create an awareness on the wide range of careers in a clinical research organisation and provide learners with practical insights that will inform career choices and tertiary studies.

The learners spent four informative days at the CAPRISA headquarters, the CAPRISA eThekwini and the Vulindlela Research clinics, in both administrative and clinical disciplines. This was the first time that the Vulindlela clinic hosted learners through this programme.

“This annual initiative held over the July school vacation period forms part of CAPRISA’s investment in the next generation,” said Marietjie Geldenhuys, head of CAPRISA’s Human Resources department. “The young adults made the most of the placements in their respective primary areas of interest - some joined the IT department, while others were with communications and administrative departments, demonstrating a keen interest to pursue this areas as careers.”

NICD post-graduates obtain Masters degrees with distinction

We congratulate Aga Szydlik (top) and Sharon Madzorera (bottom) from the HIV Virology Laboratory at the National Institutes of Communicable Diseases (NICD) on obtaining their MSc degrees with distinction this month.

Aga Szydlik, supervised by CAPRISA Senior Associate Scientists Professors Lynn Morris and Penny Moore, produced a dissertation entitled “Expression and neutralization capacity of single domain HIV antibody fragments”. Her work aimed to design and engineer functional fragments of HIV antibodies, in the hope that smaller bNAb molecules might be useful for future therapeutic use and as microbiocides through lactobacillus expression.

Sharon Madzorera, also supervised by Moore, worked on bNAb immunogen design to simultaneously target two epitopes, the MPER and V1V2 regions. Sharon’s dissertation was entitled “Engineering HIV Viral variants as immunogens to stimulate broadly neutralizing antibodies”.

“Well done, Sharon and Aga, we are proud of you and look forward to seeing you move on to even bigger things!”, said Moore.
Scientific papers published in 2018


*continuation from previous newsletter

CAPRISA Rewards & Recognition Programme – iSpotU awards presented for innovation

Congratulations to CAPRISA staff members, Ms Sma Mzobe (left in the photo), Human Resources Administrator and Mr Reshaad Rasool (right in the photo), Information Technology Developer as the recipients of the CAPRISA iSpotU Award for Innovation. Mzobe and Rasool designed and developed an online platform to manage Clinical Research Placement activities that would provide mentors with an efficient interactive tool to review assignments, provide feedback and sign off tasks.