USAID pioneer prize awarded to CAPRISA

Inaugural award recognises excellence in the use of science and technology to solve development challenges

In January, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced CAPRISA as the winner of the Science and Technology Pioneers Prize.

The prize, which is being inaugurated this year, recognises excellence in the use of science and technology to solve development challenges.

The CAPRISA 004 Tenofovir gel trial, conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, was funded by USAID and the South African Department of Science and Technology, and conducted by a group of South African and US researchers. It provided proof of concept that an antiretroviral gel used before and after sex can protect women against HIV.

The microbicide gel, containing 1% Tenofovir, an antiretroviral usually used for treatment, was 39% effective in preventing HIV infection in women. It also had the welcome and unexpected benefit of 51% effectiveness in preventing genital herpes infections.

These protective effects were even higher for those women who used the gel most of the time.

The ultimate triumph came when the results were revealed to the world at the 2010 International AIDS Conference in Vienna, Austria.

As the final results were announced, it led to a standing ovation, a rare occurrence at scientific meetings of this nature. The follow-on confirmatory trial, FACTS 001, involving up to 2900 women is currently under way at nine research clinics across South Africa.

"Research on the gel shows how fruitful international partnerships between US and South African scientists can be, in this case addressing one of the biggest challenges facing our country – the AIDS epidemic. Over the past decade, CAPRISA has played an instrumental role in HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment research, making some groundbreaking discoveries. We commend the outstanding work they have done in the quest to find an effective HIV prevention technology for women," said Minister of Science and Technology, Derek Hanekom.
The Consortium for the Evaluation and Performance of HIV Incidence Assays (CEPHIA) led by Professor Chris Pilcher from the University of California, San Francisco visited the CAPRISA clinical sites and laboratories to prepare a study which will collect samples from participants to look for new biomarkers to measure HIV incidence (number of new cases per year). The CAPRISA 002 Acute Infection study has been following women from early HIV infection, allowing precise estimates of duration of infection to be conducted. Measuring HIV incidence (rather than prevalence) is crucial to understand the epidemic as it will allow the monitoring of the number of newly-infected cases in a population. The CEPHIA Project is funded by the Gates Foundation.

- Nigel Garrett

Continued from page 1

David Stanton, Director of USAID’s Office of HIV/AIDS, remarked: "The CAPRISA 004 trial was a key milestone in an ongoing journey towards an approved microbicide product for women, putting us one step closer to an AIDS-free generation."

Quarraisha Abdool Karim, Associate Director of CAPRISA and leader of the research team for this trial, said: "The team is honoured and humbled by this recognition. We will be using the $200 000 (R2,2 million) prize on research to understand why and how HIV spreads so rapidly in young women in South Africa."

Fellows’ open day at CAPRISA

In February, CAPRISA held an open day for its fellows with the aim of providing an opportunity to interact, present updates on the status of their projects during their fellowship period and to gain a broader understanding of other research projects being undertaken by co-fellows.
MTN’s Sharon Hillier visits CAPRISA

Professor Sharon Hillier, Principal Investigator for the Microbicide Trials Network, Vice Chair for Faculty Affairs and Director of Reproductive Infectious Disease research at the Magee-Womens Research Institute at the University Of Pittsburgh School Of Medicine, recently visited CAPRISA. Professor Hillier’s main areas of interest focus on women’s health and HIV prevention, as well as variations in the vaginal microbiome and the influence this has on genital tract infections and HIV.

Professor Hillier held in-depth discussions with the MTN 020 (ASPIRE) study team, pharmacists and a Community Advisory Board member at the CAPRISA eThekwini Prevention Clinic, where they shared their experiences working across the VOICE and ASPIRE studies, the differences in implementing the studies and the lessons learnt from VOICE which were used to achieve the high quality standards in the ASPIRE study thus far. A particular area of Professor Hillier’s interest related to staff interactions with participants in the community post study enrolment.

She also met with two ASPIRE study participants to garner their opinions on HIV prevention, study participation and future options for HIV prevention such as combination HIV prevention and contraceptive strategies.

During the visit, Professor Hillier delivered a presentation on “Changing the contraceptive mix in high incidence HIV populations”, which was followed by a dynamic question and answer session.

- Lulu Nair

Andy Gray awarded Donald E Francke Medal

The Donald E Francke Medal for 2014 has been awarded to Andy Gray by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), one of the largest associations representing pharmacists who practice in hospitals and other health systems. This award will be presented to Andy at the 2014 ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting and Exhibition, 7-11 December 2014, Anaheim, California.

“Looking at the list of previous awardees, I am honoured to be included amongst them. I have served with many of them on various committees and have benefitted from those experiences. I hope that I can continue to contribute in the myriad ways they have, across the globe,” said Andy.

Andy is CAPRISA’s consultant pharmacist and a Senior Lecturer in UKZN’s Discipline of Pharmaceutical Sciences. He has practiced and been involved in community pharmacy, hospital pharmacy, as well as academia and research since 1992. His research interests include policy examination, particularly in terms of improvement and effectiveness of national medicine policies.

- UKZN Ndaba Online

KZN Province award for Quarraisha

At the Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) for Health’s Annual Service Excellence Awards, Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim received special recognition for her “overall contribution for health care especially focusing on HIV prevention and women’s health through research.” Professor Abdool Karim (middle) is pictured with Head of Department for the Kwa-Zulu-Natal Department of Health, (KZNDoH) Dr Sibongile Zungu (left) and the MEC for KZNDoH, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo. The event took place at Durban’s International Convention Centre.
Scientific papers published in 2014


* continuation from previous month

Scientific Reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstracts submitted for review</th>
<th>Manuscripts submitted for review</th>
<th>Ancillary studies submitted for review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total #</td>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>Total #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# for month, * since committee initiation

Conferences and Workshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Abstracts</th>
<th>Registration</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections — Boston, USA</td>
<td>3-6 Mar 2014</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td><a href="http://www.croi2014.org/">www.croi2014.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone Symposia: HIV Pathogenesis— Virus vs Host — Banff, Canada</td>
<td>9-14 Mar 2014</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td><a href="http://www.keystonesymposia.org/14X4">www.keystonesymposia.org/14X4</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Board of Control: AC Bawa (Chair) SS Abdool Karim R Bharuthram D Clark LP Fried (US) S Madhi S Naidoo DP Visser ZM Yacoob
Scientific Advisory Board: C Hankins (Chair) SM Dholo FG Handley HL Gabelnick R Hoff Y-R Lo Y Shao

CAPRISA is an official research institute of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Columbia University.
CAPRISA was established in 2002 through a CIPRA grant from the NIH, as a multi-institutional collaboration, incorporated as an independent non-profit AIDS Research Organisation.
Registration Number: 2002/02/4027/08

February 2014; 13(2): page 4