



## NEWSLETTER

June 2010

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### NEWS

#### News from Microbicides 2010

The International 2010 Microbicides Conference (M2010) happened in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States from 22 – 25 May and was themed “Microbicides: Building Bridges in HIV Prevention”. The RHRU was represented at the conference by Helen Rees, Regina Osih and Thesla Palanee.



There is much news from the conference in the media at the moment. Here are some of the articles:

#### Using ARVs for prevention

Using antiretrovirals in microbicides as an effective HIV prevention method specifically aimed at women is in the spotlight at the Microbicides 2010 conference.



Robin Shattock, who leads a research team at the Centre for Infection and Immunity at St George's University in London, said that numerous prevention studies were investigating the effectiveness of tenofovir as a prevention method. Shattock said the battle against HIV would not be won by treatment alone but there was a need for more effective prevention methods.

Nomfundo Eland from the Treatment Action Campaign said there was a need for improved delivery systems alongside scientific research. “Research and science alone will not win the fight on new infection but we will win when combined strategies to address behaviour, gender inequality, economic status of women and access to prevention tools owned by women are available,” Eland told the conference. She said it was critical to engage communities and to get communities informed on the various prevention methods and trials taking place within their vicinity. She said issues such as stigma, policies that discriminate against those infected with HIV, sexual discrimination and funding cuts continued to pose a threat to the success of prevention methods.

Vuyiseka Dubula, General Secretary, Treatment Action Campaign, urged researchers to persevere amidst the challenges. “I know that there is a lot of negativity on prevention biomedical research due to many microbicides studies being disappointing but we cannot give up. Activism without science is nothing and science without activism can only go so far. We need evidence to advocate for better tools for prevention,” she said.

For more information go to:  
<http://www.health-e.org.za/news/article.php?uid=20032797>

### Rename our radio show and win a prize!

As you will read in the article on page 2, “Thetha FM, Jozi FM and now Alex FM”, the RHRU radio show will begin airing on Alex FM in August 2010. We are considering changing the name of the show from ‘Tshireletso Health Talk’ to something new. Send in your suggestions for a new name and stand a chance to win a prize pack! Email your suggestions to [bsaxon@rhru.co.za](mailto:bsaxon@rhru.co.za) by 16 July 2010.

Please send us any news or views.  
We would like to hear from you!  
Contact your cluster representative.



### Partner pregnant? HIV risk doubles



The risk of men being infected by HIV doubles when their partners are pregnant, according to new findings presented at the conference.

Previous studies on the risk of getting HIV have shown that women are about twice as susceptible to HIV when they are pregnant.

But now Dr Nelly Mugo, from the University of Nairobi and University of Washington, has found the risk is much higher for men too. "The risk of getting HIV during pregnancy is twofold – both for the pregnant women and for their male partners," she said. "Biological factors are probably driving the increased risk for men," she said.

Women are known to shed more virus when pregnant resulting in a higher HIV concentration in their genital tract. "We usually call in men during pregnancy for antenatal care for the mom and the baby. Now we need to call in men for their own good to be involved and tested," Mugo advised. The study she led involved 3321 serodiscordant couples from South Africa, Botswana, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The second small study concerning pregnancy tested the use of a vaginal microbicide – a single small dose tenofovir gel – during pregnancy in 16 healthy HIV-negative women and found it was safe. "Only small amounts of drug are absorbed into the bloodstream, amniotic fluid and umbilical cord blood," stated Dr Richard Beigi from the University of Pittsburgh, who led the study for the Microbicide Trials Network (MTN). Beigi said women had to be on contraception for microbicide trials but not infrequently they fell pregnant during these studies. "This compelled us at MTN to dive in and start microbicide research during pregnancy," he said. "This study is the first to look at microbicide use during pregnancy, and the first time a drug is being tested in parallel (in pregnant and non-pregnant) women."

For the full story go to:  
<http://www.timeslive.co.za/news/local/article465732.ece/Partner-pregnant-HIV-risk-doubles>

### The South African National AIDS Council and the RHRU



The South African National AIDS Council has been in the news recently with the launch of their HIV Counselling and Testing campaign, which aims to get 15 million South Africans tested by June 2011 and has the ultimate goal of ensuring that every South African knows their status.

The RHRU has considerable involvement with the SANAC and there are many RHRU staff members who are on SANAC task teams and committees, working to help shape the way the Council addresses issues around HIV and AIDS in our country and ensuring a healthier future for all South Africans. Vivian Black recently had the honour of being appointed chair of the Prevention Technical Task Team. Congratulations to Viv!

Other staff members include Helen Rees, who is the Co-Chair of the Programme Implementing Committee and the Co-Chair of the Research Sector Prevention Sub Committee. Both Helen Rees and Sinead Delaney-Moretwe are on the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Task Team; and Francois Venter is on the Treatment, Care and Support Technical Task Team.

For more information on the SANAC please go to <http://www.sanac.org.za/>

### Theta FM, Jozi FM and now Alex FM!

The Research Cluster has been awarded a second Wellcome Trust International Engagement Award for a project titled: "Engaging the public in clinical trial research using radio drama, popular journalism and listener clubs." Bonnie Jeanne Saxon, who initiated and headed the grant application said, "The project aims to increase dialogue on clinical



research within the community and to develop a dynamic 30-minute 'Health talk' show." The revised show will include: a 12-minute drama piece (voiced by community members), four minutes of recorded Vox Pops (on the spot interviews with local people), 10 minutes of questions & answers with an expert, and time for caller questions. The stories and voices of community members and former trial participants will be included in the creation of the drama series.

With the recent move from Baragwanath Nurses Home to the renovated Research & Training Centre in Hillbrow, the research cluster is no longer working directly in Soweto and in the upcoming months, 'Tshiriletso Health Talk' will move from Jozi FM to Alex FM. Once the revised show is aired on Alex FM, a Listener Club (LC) will be formed and will give members of the Alexandra community the chance to give their feedback on the content of the show. The LC will evaluate and improve the show based on community perceptions and requests.

For more information, please contact Bonnie Jeanne Saxon, at [bsaxon@rhru.co.za](mailto:bsaxon@rhru.co.za) or 011 358 5419.

### RHRU UPDATES

#### Ke nako! It is time!

With the World Cup just around the corner, it seems like the whole of South Africa has gone soccer mad, and the RHRU is no exception! Staff members are really getting into the Soccer Spirit, from colourful flags making the exterior of the Hugh Solomon building look fantastically festive to exciting soccer and netball face-offs with Aurum.



The RHRU's got rhythm! Our staff members do the disk dance



From left to right: Dan Mosia, Helen Rees, Francois Venter and Eugene Sickle in front of a festive HSB

The RHRU also held disk dance classes on Friday 14 May and these were a huge success. There were three sessions during the course of the afternoon, and over 50 staff members per session showed up to put on their dancing shoes and show off their rhythm! Due to the overwhelming response there have been requests to repeat these dance sessions on Fridays, so keep an ear out for if and when this may happen.

Please send us any news or views.  
We would like to hear from you!  
Contact your cluster representative.

### A word in our defence...



*Lincoln gets his come-uppance, or how to break a rapist's arm!*

RHRU field workers often find themselves in potentially risky situations, all the more so since the mobile clinic became operational. So in an attempt to 'arm' staff with the ability to handle untoward situations, the Community Care Centre organised self-defence classes.

Participants were given practical advice such as: always walk with your keys in your hand, between your fingers. If you need to use them as a weapon, slash, don't stab. It causes bleeding, and even hardened criminals hate the sight of their own blood and will be taken aback long enough for you to get away. Don't walk on the shop side of the pavement; always stay close to the street. Surrounding a pedestrian in a shop doorway is common practice and you'll be minus your wallet and cell phone before you have any idea what's happening.

Staff also learned how to get out of common holds, particularly in a potential rape situation, and how to break the attacker's arm – it's easier than you think! However, these moves take practice and can't be mastered in a few sessions. So staff have an open invitation to attend judo classes at Wits every Monday or Wednesday at 6pm; just say you work at the RHRU. One member of staff, who prefers to remain anonymous, has been to two classes so far and already knows four ways to strangle someone. But she did feel a bit silly when she was thrown by a 12-year-old!

### RHRU Pharmacy relocated and awaiting new licence

The RHRU Pharmacy, which was previously located at the Nurses Home in Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, was recently relocated to the newly renovated RHRU Research and Training Centre in Esselen Street, Hillbrow.



*The relocated R and T Pharmacy*

As per South African Pharmacy Regulations, all pharmacy relocations require new licensing by the National Department of Health (DOH). The relevant documents were completed and submitted to the DOH on 23 March 2010. An acknowledgement of licence application letter has been received, thus allowing pharmacy activity to resume while awaiting the new licence. The issuing of the licence will be preceded by an inspection visit conducted by the South African Pharmacy Council to ascertain that the new premises comply with Good Pharmacy Practice (GPP).

The newly appointed pharmacists, Nkuli Mashabane and Faith Maputla, are geared up to ensure that the R and T Pharmacy is optimally managed and compliant to both international and local guidelines governing the studies. As access to the pharmacy is restricted we unfortunately cannot invite you for a viewing. However, should you require further information on the RHRU Pharmacy, please contact [nmashabane@rhru.co.za](mailto:nmashabane@rhru.co.za)

### RHRU Mobile Clinic shows team work in the North West

The Bophelong Psychiatric Hospital in the North West invited the RHRU's Mobile Clinic Support Team (MCST) to its HIV Counselling and Testing launch in May. This exciting event was included the Hospital CEO, Mr Mosimege being tested in the RHRU van, with RHRU staff members



*The A-team in front of a mobile clinic*

Conference Kok and Clarina Madito having the honour of counselling and testing him. As usual, the MCST members outdid themselves as they performed pre- and post counselling, testing, data collection and even marketed the RHRU's mobile clinic services to people. All in all, 46 people were tested during the launch. They were so successful that the team got another invitation to a youth function on June 16 by a youth leader who was impressed by the dedication and team work displayed by the MCST members.

### A look at maternal and child health in the North West

Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) is a global concern and in South Africa a major challenge is the amount of pregnant women testing HIV positive. In order to strengthen PMTCT services, the RHRU is aiming to provide support to antenatal clinics in the North West. Currently the RHRU provides clinical support in the province through fast track doctors and Monitoring & Evaluation, but only to wellness clinics. Site visits were conducted by the RHRU Maternal Health and HIV project in order to understand health systems in the North West and to determine the role that the RHRU's Mobile Clinic Support Team can play in supporting the Department of Health with regards to antenatal care and PMTCT services. A secondary objective was to train health providers on new or revised PMTCT guidelines. The RHRU's maternal health team also wanted to conduct gap analyses between wellness clinic and primary health clinics (PHCs).



Four sites were visited: Christiana Hospital, Taung District Hospital, Schweizer Reneke District Hospital, and Vryburg Hospital. Taung Hospital is the main ART site in this district and has more than 3600 patients on ART. It also refers patients down to other treatment sites in the province. The RHRU provides staff in various capacities for all these sites, which includes quality improvement advisers, counsellor advisers, data capturers, patient follow-up workers, PHC nurses and data managers. RHRU currently supports wellness clinics in all these facilities, focusing on the down-referral system.

Following the visits it was decided that with the team the RHRU has in the North West, technical and operational support can be provided to many hospitals. With the referral system in place, from wellness clinics to maintenance sites, the RHRU can also provide similar support to other facilities including PHCs where antenatal care and PMTCT services are rendered and can also expand the services provided to antenatal clinics within the facilities already supported. Possible support to PHCs across districts supported by the RHRU includes quality assurance and improvement; training and monitoring and evaluation.

Please send us any news or views.  
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## Reaching out, reaching in



*Nthabiseng Kgomo from youth-friendly services*

Recently Nthabiseng Kgomo, counsellor from youth-friendly services, visited the Johannesburg correctional centre B (Sun City prison). She was invited by the Area Co-ordinator for HIV/AIDS in the Department of Correctional Services. She ran support groups for males age 22 to 26 and for females age 20 to 26, teaching inmates to love themselves. Both groups found

Nthabiseng's visit motivational and everyone enjoyed the day, which included lunch, drama and games.

Nthabiseng found it difficult seeing young people trying to come to terms with their HIV status while also dealing with incarceration, but she drew inspiration from their determination to do something better with their lives and put their time in prison to the best use possible.

Prison work is never easy but often rewarding. Well done to Nthabiseng for having the courage to step inside those walls and reach out to young people who really need her services.

## TRAINING

### Fit for Life, Fit for Work

With roughly 65% of South Africans age 15-24 unemployed, it is understandable that the immediate need for subsistence is a much higher priority for youth than concerns about HIV and AIDS. Yet HIV prevalence in this age group is 8.7%; and young women are disproportionately at risk of HIV infection, with more than three quarters (77%) of young South Africans living with HIV being female.



*Fit for life collages: Artwork illustrates hopes and dreams*

"Fit for Life, Fit for Work" aims to tackle these social emergencies in an integrated and strategic manner. It is a youth training scheme that combines life coping skills with work preparedness to provide industry with an eager and enthusiastic work force well versed in the practical and ethical requirements of the work place. At the same time, the course gives young people the self-confidence and self-esteem to make life-enhancing rather than destructive decisions in their personal lives, thus reducing high-risk behaviour and ultimately HIV incidence.

Over the next six weeks RHRU will give 30 youths, 60% of them female, the chance to become fit for life and work. But the commitment doesn't stop there. When the training course is complete, trainees will have a chance to develop work-specific skills, such as IT, catering, driving, etc. They will also be supported in their job search campaign and in employment for a full year after completing the course. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the course will run four times a year for the next two years. To find out more about how you can be involved in this exciting initiative, contact the Fit for Life Work Liaison Officer, Tshepo Mashao on [tmashao@rhru.co.za](mailto:tmashao@rhru.co.za), or the Project Co-ordinator, Ellen Crabtree on [ecrabtree@rhru.co.za](mailto:ecrabtree@rhru.co.za)

## EVENTS

### Visual Hillbrow

"I think my photos tell us about the real life of Hillbrow," were the words spoken by one of the participants in the Visual Hillbrow mapping and photography project.



*A moment's respite from duty for Sithukile Magikuna, who shares the mammoth task of keeping Hillbrow clean. © Sibusiso Mlambo*

The project, completed in April, aimed to discover more about men's lives in Hillbrow. As well as gaining a visual understanding of the spaces around them, the project explored larger issues surrounding the role of men in research. How can the RHRU engage men in clinical trials? Are there any places where we can recruit men from? What is life in Hillbrow really like for men?

To answer some of these questions, 11 men from Hillbrow were trained by facilitators from the Market Photo Workshop (a Johannesburg based school of photography) in basic camera and photography skills. Over a four day period, they embarked on practical photographic assignments which helped them to document and explore the work, leisure and social spaces around them.

The exhibition held in the Hugh Solomon Hall on 7 May was a great success. It was attended by RHRU and Market Photo Workshop staff and students, as well as other guests from within and beyond Hillbrow.

For more information about the project, please contact Emilie Venables: [evenables@rhru.co.za](mailto:evenables@rhru.co.za). For more information about the Market Photo Workshop, contact Bekie Ntini, or visit the website: [www.marketphotoworkshop.co.za](http://www.marketphotoworkshop.co.za)



## FOR YOUR INTEREST

### An unusual use for a salad spinner!

A simple salad spinner may soon be saving lives by being turned into a rudimentary centrifuge that medical clinics in developing countries can use to separate blood without electricity. Rice University undergraduate students Lila Kerr and Lauren Theis have developed it as part of Beyond Traditional Borders, Rice's global health initiative that brings new technologies to underdeveloped countries.

"We were essentially told we need to find a way to diagnose anemia without power, without it being very costly and with a portable device," said Theis. They found that a salad spinner met those criteria. When tiny capillary tubes that contain blood are spun in the device for 10 minutes, the blood separates into heavier red blood cells and lighter plasma. The hematocrit, or ratio of red blood cells to the total volume, measured with a gauge held up to the tube, can tell clinicians if a patient is anaemic. That detail is critical for diagnosing malnutrition, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and malaria. The manual centrifuge has many advantages. It requires no electricity and has proven to be fairly robust. "It's all plastic and pretty durable," Kerr said. The students have "trekked it back and forth across campus in our backpacks and grocery bags" and it's held up fine.



The centrifuge, assembled using plastic lids, cut-up combs, yogurt containers and a hot-glue gun, costs about \$30 (R240) in parts.

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