



## NEWSLETTER

May 2010

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### NEWS

#### Jacob Zuma takes a public HIV test



On the 8th of April, 2010, President Jacob Zuma took an HIV test, timed to mark the implementation of the Government's new policies on preventing and treating the disease, which took effect on 1 April. This includes a campaign to get all South Africans to undergo testing.

"I decided to take my test today, 8 April, 2010. I am doing so to encourage as many South Africans as possible to do the same, as part of the build-up to the public launch," Zuma said. He reiterated a statement made on World AIDS Day in December that although the Government strongly encouraged testing, it believed the results were confidential. He said South Africans must work together not only to fight the disease, but also the stigma that still clings to it.

Zuma's aides have confirmed that the president's decision to be tested was part of an attempt to mark a departure from the ambivalent AIDS policies of the Mbeki administration.

According to the President, "We must also address the problem of discrimination through lifting the silence and shame that is associated with the virus and the disease. We must all play our role to fight the epidemic."

On Sunday 25 April Zuma then revealed that he was HIV negative. He disclosed his results to hundreds of people at the launch of the HIV/AIDS counselling and testing campaign in the Natalspruit Hospital, east of Johannesburg. Zuma said that after careful consideration he decided to share his test results with the public and to promote openness and help eradicate the silence and stigma accompanying the epidemic. He did, however emphasise that "...by disclosing my HIV-negative status, I am not putting pressure on any South African to do the same. Anyone's HIV status is private and confidential. Disclosure is an individual decision. We must respect the decisions of those who choose to keep their status confidential, whether positive or negative."

While some people have lauded Zuma's disclosure of his status, others are questioning his motives, suggesting he would not have disclosed if he were HIV positive. However, his decision to undergo public testing will hopefully be a positive and powerful example which will encourage many others to follow suit.

For the full story go to:

<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Politics/Zuma-takes-HIV-test-20100408>

<http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/Content.aspx?id=107169>

Please send us any news or views.

We would like to hear from you!

Contact Michelle Robinson - [mrobinson@rhu.co.za](mailto:mrobinson@rhu.co.za)



### RHRU UPDATES

#### Making a difference

Jennefer Szmetyana is the Personal Assistant to Dr. Sinead Delany-Moretlwe and has been with RHRU for just over a year. Jenny had a 'feel good' experience recently and wanted to share it with you:

"I am so excited and needed to share the news! On my way back from the Research & Training Centre this afternoon, I walked past a couple and the gentleman was trying to convince his lady friend that they should go for HIV testing. She was not willing at all and seemed a bit embarrassed. I stopped and had a quick chat with them and thanks to the training I have had at RHRU, I was able to convince her to go with him. I assured her that the staff are helpful and professional and that no one will know anything as it is done in absolute confidence, and that they will have someone walking the road with them from beginning to end regardless of the outcome of the tests. I told them that they could get loads of information on HIV/AIDS as well as STIs such as what they are, how they are contracted and how they can be prevented and how to have a happy, healthy sex life. The lady relaxed and said, "Good, let's do it," and off they went to Esselen Clinic. I have achieved a lot of success in previous jobs, but this was by far one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had!"

Thank you to Jenny for having the confidence and ability to speak with this couple. We are making a difference – one person and one couple at a time!



Esselen Street Clinic

#### Congratulations to Helen Rees

The RHRU's Executive Director, Professor Helen Rees, has had two exciting things happen this month. Firstly, she has been appointed as Chair of the World Health Organisation Strategic Group of Experts (SAGE) for the next two years. SAGE serves as the principal advisory group to the World Health Organization (WHO) for development of policy related to vaccines and immunisation.



Professor Helen Rees

It is charged with advising WHO on overall global policies and strategies, ranging from vaccine and technology research and development, to delivery of immunisation and linkages between immunisation and other health interventions. The mandate of SAGE is to provide strategic advice rather than technical input, and is not restricted to childhood vaccines and immunisation but extends to the control of all vaccine-preventable diseases.

Secondly, Helen has been appointed a Member of the National Advisory Group on Immunisation (NAGI) from 2010-2015 by the Minister of Health. NAGI is a Ministerial Committee with the responsibility of advising the Department of Health on areas such as new vaccine introduction, reviewing international strategies and recommendations to suit local needs and advising on technical and research issues. NAGI is also expected to follow closely global trends on immunisation and vaccine issues. This includes issues brought up to the SAGE on immunisation, the Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS), Global Advisory Group on Measles Control and the Global Advisory Group on Polio Eradication.

Congratulations to Professor Rees!

### EVENTS

#### WHO-UNAIDS VAC Annual Meeting

The recent WHO-UNAIDS Vaccine Advisory Committee (VAC) meeting was held in Johannesburg. VAC provides advice to WHO and UNAIDS on activities related to the development and evaluation of HIV vaccines. VAC meet several times a year and at each meeting an open scientific briefing session is organised prior to the meeting. The meeting is traditionally held in a country directly involved in HIV vaccine research and clinical trials; and therefore the briefing session is an excellent opportunity for VAC members to meet and share their expertise with local investigators.



The VAC members group photo

This year the VAC meeting and briefing sessions were organised by a team from the RHRU and was held in Johannesburg at the Crown Plaza Hotel from 22 – 23 April. The topic for the briefing session was "The state of the art in HIV vaccine science and its implications for clinical trial design." The session was chaired by Professor Rees and focused on ensuring active participation of African scientists at all stages of HIV vaccine development and how the African effort can be sustained financially and politically.

Despite some unexpected interference from Mother Nature in the form of a volcanic ash cloud, the RHRU team, headed by Susie Cornell, coped and ensured that people could attend both the meetings and those who couldn't were linked in via telephone and through a web interface. The meeting was deemed a great success, with many prestigious names in the field attending. Well done to the RHRU team for making sure this important occasion went so smoothly!

#### Know your rights! – HIV & the law



The Community Care Centre (CCC) working together with Wits law students identified a need to educate and inform the Hillbrow community about their rights under the law, and agreed that HIV & the Law and Employment Contracts were the topics of most relevance and interest.

The first workshop, on HIV and the Law, was held on 20th April and was very successful with over 20 participants. The information given was very well received and burning questions from the participants were answered and solutions provided. A case was identified and referred to the Wits Law Clinic which not everybody knew about. This first workshop was facilitated by third year law students and the second will be facilitated by fourth year students.

Despite a progressive and rights-based constitution, citizens are not always aware of the laws that protect them. It is vitally important to know the laws so that members of society can safely practise their rights. The CCC is grateful for the collaboration with Wits law faculty that allows these workshops to be run, as there is clearly a need for them, judging by the community response.

For more information contact Ellen Crabtree on [ecrabtree@rhu.co.za](mailto:ecrabtree@rhu.co.za)

## MTN 4th Annual Meeting



From left: Phumlaphi Masuku, Thesla Palanee, Oupa Mafumane and Godspower Akpomiemie, at the MTN 4th annual meeting, Arlington, USA

The 4th Annual Meeting of the Microbicide Trial Network (MTN) was held from the 15-17 March 2010 in Arlington, Virginia, USA. This was preceded by the Community Working Group (CWG) Meeting on 14 and 15 March 2010. Phumlaphi Masuku (Community Liaison Officer) and Oupa Mafumane (CWG representative) represented the RHRU at the CWG meeting and were joined by Thesla Palanee and Godspower Akpomiemie for the Annual Meeting.

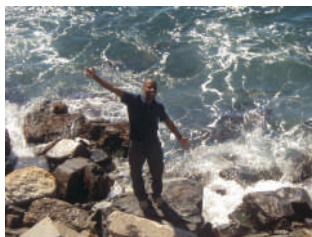
The RHRU is partnering with the MTN to conduct the MTN 003, 015 and 016 studies. MTN 003 is a Phase 2B Safety and Effectiveness Study of Tenofovir 1% Gel, Tenofovir Disoproxil Fumarate Tablet and Emtricitabine/Tenofovir Disoproxil Fumarate Tablet for the Prevention of HIV Infection in Women. MTN's goal is to stop the sexual transmission of HIV. It is involved in prevention research including clinical trials of microbicides. The purpose of the meeting was to reflect on MTN's achievements in the past, its current standing in the field of prevention research and its future plans.

The meeting provided the platform for all sites to share strategies and learn from the progress updates of activated MTN 003 sites.

RHRU aims to start accrual for MTN 003 in May this year. We will be recruiting 600 women who are sexually active, between 18-35 years of age, HIV-negative, non-pregnant, non-breastfeeding and committed to participating in the study for a follow-up period of 35 months. Should you be interested in finding out more about the study, you can contact Thesla Palanee on 011 358 5424 (reception) or e-mail: [tpalanee@rhru.co.za](mailto:tpalanee@rhru.co.za). For more information on MTN please visit [www.mtnstopshiv.org](http://www.mtnstopshiv.org)

## The Maternal Health Team shows off... ...at the 29th Priorities in Perinatal Care Conference

The Maternal Health and HIV team recently attended the 29th 'Priorities in Perinatal Care' Conference, which was held at the ATKV Goudini Spa near Worcester in Western Cape from 9-12 March. This conference serves to bring together a range of health professionals involved in, and committed to, maternal and perinatal health.



A beautiful backdrop for a conference

Vivian Black and Siphamandla Gumede have both been working on maternal health and child's health-related studies. Siphamandla Gumede presented a paper on: "Nevirapine incidence: Rash and Hepatitis", Vivian Black presented on revised PMTCT guidelines and a paper on: "Down-referral system of post-delivered women". Masego Sebeelo attended from North West Mobile Clinic Support Team. The RHRU's attendance and their work at the conference was greatly applauded by the Priorities in Perinatal Care Association.

For more information please contact Dr Vivian Black on e-mail [vblack@rhru.co.za](mailto:vblack@rhru.co.za)

## Football fever grips Men & HIV!

On the 20th of March the Men & HIV team hosted a soccer tournament as part of a wide range of activities offered to local men by the RHRU. The objective of the tournament was to ensure that men and boys have access to recreational activities and through these activities to provide information on HIV and AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, reproductive health, and other related issues.



The tournament was also an excellent opportunity to market the RHRU's services to men.

The tournament consisted of six teams of boys, aged 14-17, and two teams of young men aged 17 and above. The event was facilitated and supported by the Men & HIV team and peer educators, and they worked closely with the coaches who encouraged and accompanied their players. The trophy winners were thrilled at their success and, although there were medical staff on hand just in case, no serious injuries were suffered!

As a result of this successful activity, an opportunity has arisen to work with a local branch of the South African Police Service (SAPS). The officer in charge of sporting events at the SAPS Park Station has agreed to open up discussions around the use of the RHRU's Men & HIV services at their sporting events.

Football fever extends beyond the 2010 World Cup. Sport and other recreational activities are an excellent way of reaching out to men through a medium they are passionate about, in order to create a healthier South Africa. Viva the vuvuzela!

## Through Positive Eyes

The RHRU recently played host to the South African arm of an international project chronicling the lives and life experiences of people living with HIV around the world. 15 participants came from all over Joburg and included two RHRU peer educators and one Community Care Centre support group member. The project lasted for three weeks and included training on how to use digital cameras, digital story-telling and the power of pictures to convey life experiences.



They were trained under the mentorship of Gideon Mendel who is widely regarded as one of the world's leading contemporary photojournalists born in South Africa. He studied psychology and African history at the University of Cape Town and photographed "Change and Conflict in South Africa" in the run-up to Nelson Mandela's release from prison. Gideon also created a photographic portrait of each participant, accompanied in poster format by text taken from a personal interview, yielding moving and inspirational 'words-and-pictures' accounts of positive living in our culture.

On 19th March in the Hugh Solomon Hall an exhibition was held of the posters and the participants' photographs. Family, friends and community members were invited to a presentation by those involved in the project and the exhibition was then open for viewing. All participants received a high-quality digital camera to keep and the Market Photo Workshop hopes to keep the group together and provide further training in photography.

For more information please go to: <http://www.makeartstopaids.org/projects/positiveEyes.htm>

Please send us any news or views.

We would like to hear from you!

Contact Michelle Robinson - [mrobinson@rhru.co.za](mailto:mrobinson@rhru.co.za)

### Linking arms with UJ

On Saturday 27th March the RHRU Youth-Friendly Services peer educators, in collaboration with the University of Johannesburg HIV peer educators, launched 'The Link.com' project. The purpose of the project is to train learners and out-of-school youth to be peer educators at school, in their communities and amongst their peers. There were lots of fun activities that took place, such as painting and life skills workshops. The launch was attended by 100 young people from Jabulani Khaki Boys shelter and others living around Hillbrow.



This was a kick-off event and the training will start in earnest on 17th April and happen once a month until October. Topics will be fun and experiential.

The collaboration with University of Johannesburg is a direct result of our joint participation in the bi-monthly youth forum which we run, which brings together organisations working with youth to exchange and resolve issues, share ideas, and collaborate where relevant in projects. We are delighted to work with UJ peer educators and learn from each other as well as improve the sexual and reproductive health of lots more young people through the creation of new youth peer educators for Hillbrow.

For more information please contact: Nceda Mabuza on [nmabuza@rhru.co.za](mailto:nmabuza@rhru.co.za)

### TRAINING

#### Successful scholarship applicants

Congratulations to the RHRU's Samanta Lalla-Edward, Verushka Hansraj and Padma Dayah. They have been selected by the Foundation of Professional Development to complete the Higher Certificate in Management (HCM), formerly known as the Tomorrow's Leaders Programme, or TLP. This is an excellent management programme aimed at young potential supervisors and team leaders, giving them the opportunity to develop their entrepreneurial, management and leadership skills.



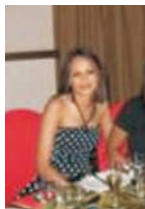
Padma Dayah



Samanta Lalla-Edward

The programme consists of five blocks and although it entails a lot of hard work it will certainly be worth it for the participants. Successful delegates will receive a certificate of completion but to meet the certification requirements, participants must attend all the workshops and successfully complete all the assignments which make up the course.

This training is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the President's Emergency Plan for Emergency Relief.



Verushka Hansraj

Good luck and best wishes to Samanta, Verushka and Padma on the successful completion of this HCM course!

### Biomarkers laboratory training - Belgium



Vinodh Edward and some of the team involved in the Biomarkers project at the ITM, Antwerp, Belgium

The Research Cluster's Vinodh Edward recently attended laboratory training held by The Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, and the University of Ghent in Belgium.

The training, which ran from 22 February - 9 March, formed part of the requirements for the Biomarkers project due to start in the second half of 2010. The purpose of this project is to establish baseline ranges of biomarkers related to the vaginal environment in groups of women targeted for microbicide trials in Kenya, Rwanda, and South Africa. The training involved routine diagnostics, immunology and anaerobic culturing of vaginal microflora.

Vinodh is currently setting up a laboratory for some of these specialised tests at the Research & Training Centre. When completed it will be the first research laboratory based at the RHRU. For more information, please contact Vinodh at [vedward@rhru.co.za](mailto:vedward@rhru.co.za)

### FOR YOUR INTEREST

#### Shaya-i- vuvuzela



As the countdown ticks towards the beginning of the 2010 Soccer World Cup, the RHRU is getting in on the action!

Everyone has been informed that there are plans to start regular Friday Soccer World-Cup activities that will involve everyone in the organisation.

These activities will be planned by a Task Team and then communicated to everyone to ensure that all staff members have the opportunity to participate, so keep an eye out for news on what is happening.

Everyone is invited to be a part of these exciting activities including the "Diski Dance" that we are planning to have in the next few weeks and during the World Cup, so watch this space!

#### A promotion for Prof Rees

On Friday 7 May the Executive Office received word that the RHRU's executive director, Helen Rees, has been promoted by Wits University, from Associate Professor to Full Professor.

This is very exciting news and we would like to extend our congratulations to Professor Rees on this well-deserved promotion!