

advancinglife

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THE AIDS FIGHT CONTINUES

HIV and AIDS remains a problem in South Africa. Women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of the HIV epidemic, with a prevalence of 21.5% compared to 13.1% in men. HIV has dramatically increased tuberculosis (TB) incidence and mortality in South Africa.

WHAT IS PREP?

PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is medicine that reduces your chances of getting HIV from sex or injection drug use. When taken as prescribed, PrEP is highly effective for preventing HIV. These can be taken as pills or injections. PrEP is safe, however, some people experience side effects like diarrhea, nausea, headache, fatigue, and stomach pain. These side effects usually go away over time.

This World AIDS Day, 1st December 2022, under the theme of "Equalize", we at the SAMRC are committed to End AIDS. There has been a surge in HIV-positive cases and Life Expectancy has once again been decreased.

We need to focus on preventative approaches and double down on interventions that have been proven to work. Efforts towards finding a vaccine are on-going and several such clinical trials are underway.

There is also the treatment action plan and injectable pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). South Africa is expected to begin piloting injectable PrEP in 2023, where adolescent girls and young women will be the first to access injectable PrEP using the antiretroviral drug cabotegravir every other month.

Not only do we conduct research but we very much believe in the importance of science advocacy.

At the SAMRC we ensure that we share the findings of our research and to continue to raise awareness about interventions that work and that can help to reduce the prevalence of this disease. In this regard science advocacy can also be useful to alleviate the HIV-related stigma, which still remains an issue, with UNAIDS data indicating that around 17% of people hold discriminatory attitudes towards people with HIV.

UNITE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

With the advent of the 16 days of Activism to End Violence Against Women and Girls, we highlight the continued contribution of our scientists and researchers and their efforts to fight this scourge.

The SAMRC has been responsive and aims to provide initiatives to tackle this problem. In September, the Gender and Health Research Unit hosted the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI). The event featured several insightful presentations and highlighted some very important information.

Presentation on the role of harmful alcohol use and poor mental health [depressive and Post Traumatic Stress (PTSD) symptomatology] as increasingly recognised drivers and consequences of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The data indicated that men's harmful alcohol use is associated with increased risk for violence perpetration against women, whether they be intimate partners or not; women whose partners were frequently drunk report, higher odds of intimate partner violence experience.

Discussions also centered around adverse childhood experiences, gender attitudes,

poor mental health and men's perpetration of violence against women. It was said that adverse childhood experiences have a direct and indirect impact on men's use of violence against their partners as well as against non-partners. Efforts need to focus on violence prevention programs that are gender transformative and inclusive by engaging men and boys and need to continue across a life-course in order to address the multiple risk factors.

At the SAMRC we are committed to producing reliable data, which is critical to understanding the extent of femicide in South Africa. Unfortunately, women continue to be killed daily by intimate partners. Although a decline in femicide rates was observed, efforts aimed at intensifying preventive interventions to save and improve the lives of women and girls are still very much needed. Our research of eighteen years has proven that Femicide is preventable.

We recently released an evidence brief which summarises the findings of the second National Study of Child Murder. In so doing, it seeks to address the key question: is there any evidence that the national efforts to combat child abuse and neglect in South Africa are having any impact on deaths of children from abuse and neglect?

Findings in the evidence brief shows that deaths from child abuse and neglect in South Africa has decreased, with deaths due to abuse and neglect reduced by more than halved.

“ We have found an overall reduction in the number of child murders due to abuse and neglect. However, as long as one child dies due to this problem, our country cannot rest. Child abuse and neglect, especially the killing of female children, is preventable.

– Prof Glenda Gray

“ Women continue to be killed daily by intimate partners in south Africa. Although we saw a decline in femicide rates we need to intensify preventive interventions to save and improve the lives of South African women.

– Prof Naeemah Abrahams

**16 DAYS OF
ACTIVISM**

OUR WORLD NEEDS YOU



Step up and be the change



Through the SAMRC's "Our World Needs You" campaign we encourage active citizenship and for all our staff to be ambassadors for change.

This is following the United Nations universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity now and in the future.

For this year's World Environment day, 5 June, the SAMRC in partnership with Save a Fishie, a Non-Profit Company, joined forces to do a beach clean-up at Milnerton lagoon and beach.

You don't need to be an environmental practitioner or a researcher to help protect human health from environmental health risks.

Saving our planet, lifting people out of poverty, advancing economic growth, all of these are one and the same fight and share the same objective. We need connect the dots between climate change, water scarcity, energy shortages, global health, food security and women's empowerment.

"Solutions to one problem can be solutions for all"



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- Join a river- or beach clean-up
- Reduce, reuse, and recycle your rubbish
- Protect yourself and children from the sun by wearing sunscreen or sitting in the shade
- Stay safe from flooded areas to avoid being washed away, or being exposed to waterborne diseases
- Stay cool and drink a lot of water on hot days.



DID YOU KNOW?

MORE THAN 90% OF DIABETES CARE IS SELF-CARE?

That's right, not your doctor, or the clinic, or your spouse, but SELF. Modern technology has given us vast access to resources, but it is not just about knowing, we also need to take action. Take charge of your health, know your numbers and prevent Diabetes.



Take charge of your health, starting today

In South Africa, about 4.2 million people live with diabetes, and almost half of these individuals are unaware.

A 2018 report by Statistics SA revealed that diabetes is the number one killer of women in South Africa and the second cause of death in both men and women.

On World Diabetes Day, 14 November, we offered our time to raise awareness about this preventable disease that is affecting our country and the world.

Our experts visited the Parow Senior Centre



sharing important information on Diabetes care and preventive measures that can be taken.

The senior citizens were quite welcoming and expressed a thirst for much valuable information on the topic aimed to improve their well-being. Those living with diabetes and hypertension were keen to know whether they are on the right track with their eating habits and were quite enthused about getting tips for exercise.

With increased physical activity playing a vital role in preventing Diabetes, and to get our bodies moving, we also held a Diabetes Day Fun Walk at Jack Muller Park in Belville where friends and family came to learn more about what can be done to end diabetes, starting with ourselves. This public engagement opportunity was well received and highlighted the need for increased active citizenship in our daily lives. Public were afforded time to liaise with our Diabetes experts from Biomedical Research and Innovation Platform and the Non-communicable Disease Research Unit, respectively.

"Access to Diabetes Care for All" was this year's theme and under the initiative of "Education to Protect Tomorrow."

Getting TB back on track

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, several reports have indicated poor access to TB control measures and as result TB cases have increased. It is critical that we get TB control back on track now!

As TB is a disease that manifests slowly, there is still much to learn in terms of the full impact of the pandemic. TB is still a major health crisis in the country and responsible for approximately 61,000 deaths annually. The SAMRC is committed to fighting against this disease.

Our scientists have developed an international "best practices" guide aimed at the management of pregnant and postpartum women with drug resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB). Due to the lack of information available at a primary healthcare level, healthcare workers are fearful of DR-TB and

pregnant and postpartum women with DR-TB are subjected to discriminatory infection control practices and inferior treatment regimens.

A study funded by the SAMRC called the NExT study, has revealed that a novel all-oral super-short six (6)-month treatment regimen is effective for multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB).

The study was performed across five different settings in South Africa, namely: Cape Town; George; Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth); Durban and Klerksdorp.

Participants were randomly assigned to receive the novel 6-month oral treatment regimen compared to the WHO approved 9-month injectable-based regimen.

The key finding was that the new regimen was more than twice more likely to lead to a favourable outcomes than the traditional approach despite the regimen only being taken for 6 months. A shorter oral 6-month regimen will mean that painful and toxic injectable drugs will be avoided, and the shorter regimen is likely to improve compliance, completion rates, and reduce overall cost to TB programmes.

The NExT study sets a new benchmark for the treatment of MDR-TB, which threatens to derail TB control in many parts of the world including Eastern Europe and Russia.



Dr Marian Loveday and Prof Charles Shey Wiysonge, presented at the PHASA conference and discussed the international "best practices guide" and vaccine hesitancy and what do to when we have a TB vaccine, respectively.

KNOW YOUR TB STATUS

Symptoms to be aware of are:

- Persistent cough (which lasts for more than 2 weeks)
- Cough with blood in sputum
- Fever for more than 2 weeks
- Pain in chest
- Weight loss
- Night sweats
- Loss of appetite



Shaping tomorrow's leaders in science

As part of commemorating youth month, the SAMRC hosted a group of 30 Grade 9 – 11 learners for the SAMRC Gen S (Generation Science) Job Shadow Programme from 27 June – 01 July.

Piloting this year, the initiative saw learners being placed and allocated mentors at four of our research units at our Cape Town region including Biomedical Research and Innovation Platform (BRIP), Centre for Tuberculosis Research (CTR), Genomics Centre and the Non-communicable Disease Research Unit (NDCRU).

The aim and objective of the initiative was to expose learners to the different careers available at the SAMRC and the organisational culture, while also presenting them with an opportunity to gain insight on the work undertaken by the organisation and the positive impact we have on the lives of South Africans.

Our Vice-President, Professor Liesl Zühlke inspired the learners by sharing her science journey which she says wasn't an easy one but because she had big dreams, to work hard to get to where she is. "Big dreams are nothing without a plan, and a plan is nothing without hard work," she said.

Great fun combined with learning was had by all the learners who also received a certificate of completion.

We are hopeful to expand the program to more of our units across all regions in 2023.

“Big dreams are nothing without a plan, and a plan is nothing without hard work”
– Prof Liesl Zühlke



Research Capacity Development

The SAMRC is committed to building capacity for the long-term sustainability of health research, while also simultaneously attaining health research transformation.

These are key responsibilities of the SAMRC's Research Capacity Development (RCD) division, which provides funding for the next generation of health researchers through a variety of scholarships and research grants aimed at early- and mid-career scientists at South African universities. The applications for SAMRC RCD funding undergo a thorough, transparent and fair review process. The candidates are selected based on the eligibility criteria of each request for applications (RFA).

Each year, this culminates in the Early-Career Scientific Convention, with the 16th instalment held on the 25-26th October 2022 in Cape Town. The theme for this year was "Defining Impact and Success in Science" and was useful in terms of providing an opportunity for scholars to network,

share experiences, successes, and challenges, and present their work to their peers.

The SAMRC is invested in developing the limited critical mass of medical and health scientists and supporting our next generation across various health professions.

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ABOUT THE SAMRC

The SAMRC is dedicated to improving the health of South Africans. Established in 1969, the organisation, has for the past five decades been at the forefront of responsive research, medical innovations and transformative science – the organisation conducts and funds health research, health innovation, development and research translation.

www.samrc.ac.za

